

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PROVERBS AND WORLDVIEWS: AN ANALYSIS OF IKWO PROVERBS AND THEIR
WORLDVIEWS

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

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This study explores Ikwo proverbs to examine traditional Ikwo worldview(s) that have so far been marginalized in academic research. Specifically, it aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. Which Ikwo worldview(s) are expressed in their proverbs?
2. Do such worldview(s) represent the interests of all social groups of the Ikwo society?
3. Why and how should Ikwo proverbs be taught in contemporary school curricula?

The first chapter presents the motivational framework for the research. The second chapter reviews the literature, identifies the gap in knowledge and the research questions. Chapter three discusses the theoretical and methodological choices made for collecting and analysing data. Chapter four presents and analyses data for views expressed. Chapter five discusses the views identified in chapter four and the potential application of Ikwo proverbs in a programme of education likely to enhance their understanding and critical interrogation.

The analysis has been guided by Winick's model (2001) as well as the structuralist meaning-by-opposition model of Lévi-Strauss (Duranti, 1997). The questionnaire analysis highlights that Ikwo proverbs reflected the views of the predominantly non-literate and rural dwelling male elders at the expense of those of other groups like women and youth. The interview analysis shows that many Ikwo proverbs disseminate views that tend to polarize the society while others tend to enhance consensus and community cohesion. The study identified the liminal space and the consensus-oriented proverbs that represent their views that have been marginalized in contemporary Igbo or other researches as its major contribution to knowledge.

In addition to the major gaps in Ikwo research, there is currently no significant consideration of Ikwo proverbs in school or university curricula in Nigeria. This study argues, however, that such proverbs plus other proverbs that look at the full spectrum of Ikwo cultural heritage should be integrated in a programme of education likely to enhance the critical interrogation of key aspects of traditional knowledge and contribute to a reassessment of the importance of Ikwo language and culture, which might ultimately save it from extinction.

Key words: proverbs, worldviews, Ikwo language, Ikwo culture, majority, minority, consensus, liminal category.

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Copyright declaration

I declare that the original work presented in this thesis is the work of the author, Azubuike Franklin Onwe. I have been responsible for all aspects of the study, unless otherwise stated. The research for this thesis was carried out between September 2012 and June 2016. This work has not been submitted for any other course or qualification on a previous occasion.

Azubuike Franklin Onwe

Introduction

The analysis of key aspects of the Ikwo culture as expressed in their proverbs and how these proverbs reflect people's views of the world is the focus of this study.

The Ikwo people are a subgroup of the Igbo who live in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria, in the present day Ebonyi State. Their language and culture is among those threatened by the real and imminent danger of extinction facing minority languages and cultures across the globe. Though predominantly a rural and agrarian community, the people's language and culture possess certain characteristics, the study of which promises to be a rewarding undertaking for linguists, sociologists and anthropologists.

Ikwo proverbs were chosen for analysis because it could be argued that they provide researchers with excellent opportunities to explore traditional perspectives further.

The study investigates the "overarching philosophy" (Samovar and Porter, 2004, p. 85) that pervades Ikwo proverbs and which informs the way they view the world, and which they consider to be the philosophical bedrock of their society, important enough to be identified, preserved and transmitted to future generations. It analysed the proverbs of the Ikwo people of southeast Nigeria to identify the Ikwo worldview as reflected in them, and to determine whether identified worldviews were representative of the views of all the social groups of the Ikwo society.

To achieve the above aim the proverbs collected for this study were first grouped into six categories according to the issues they treated, following the Firth (1926b) system of proverb classification by function. Second, the total number of proverbs quoted by respondents on an issue was divided into groups depending on the views they expressed. This division was based on the sorting system of proverbs for worldview analysis recommended by Winick (2001) and the meaning-in-opposition view of thought (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). Lévi-Strauss's model was later expanded by (Leach, 1964) to include the "consensus" category of view.

Proverbs were chosen for the analysis in this study because in the Ikwo society, proverbs play a fundamental role in the formation of human character and in child upbringing. They transmit societal norms and values from one generation to another and serve as a tool for instruction, training, guiding, correcting, reprimanding and praising children during their journey from childhood to adulthood. Proverbs also help adults to navigate through the difficulties and complexities of life successfully. Ikwo proverbs cover most aspects of life. Proverbs abound that encourage the virtues and discourage the vices of the Ikwo society. Such proverbs that encourage honesty, hard work, cooperation, hospitality, justice, humility etc. and discourage pride, injustice, selfishness, rivalry, laziness, dishonesty etc. are examined in this study.

In an era of globalization indigenous proverbs will help to preserve indigenous knowledge and cultural worldviews, which – according to Nwankwo (2015) – might help to enhance communication between different generations and reduce social instability and conflicts. Nwankwo examined the effects of early acquisition of proverbs in language and on the overall development of the child among the Igbo, and concluded that proverbs help to resolve social conflicts and restore the dignity of the people.

It could be argued that proverbs are such an integral part of language that no reasonable study of the Ikwo language will be complete without a study of its proverbs. This is more so when the impact of proverbs on people's mentalities is considered.

The important roles that proverbs play as an important instrument of social engineering has been highlighted by many scholars. For example, Mieder (2004) and Taylor (1994) agree that proverbs encapsulate character and wisdom. Harold (1970) describes proverbs as "a means of social control" (p. 151) noting that proverbs are employed to control activities without the use of force, or devices of shame. Much as they can be used as a means of reproof, they are often used as a means of praise. As a mechanism of social or personal control in the Ikwo society, proverbs help to keep social and personal behaviour within accepted bounds.

Nwadike (2009) studied the role of proverbs in the intellectual development of the Igbo child, and concluded that proverbs are the sum of the values and norms inherent in a society which shape people's way of thinking and interpersonal relationships. He argues that people gain insight into the social structure of the society and even their belief system through proverbs.

Similarly, Nwoga (1975, p. 198 cited in Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994, p. 197) identifies two very important functions of proverbs in Igboland, namely, as instruments of "illumination" of the mind, used to reinforce message and as instrument of "correction," used to comment on behaviour with the intent to correct. As an instrument of correction, proverbs serve as a weapon through which individuals especially the younger ones become culturally socialized in the mores of his society. A child who learns through this means is doubly advantaged because he understands proverbs when adults use it before him, and he uses them with dexterity in conversation with his peers to their admiration. He earns the approval and respect of both the adults and his peers, thus endearing him to the hearts of both the young and the old, who see him as a cultured individual.

Other studies that highlight the importance of proverbs to the Igbo with which the Ikwo society share close cultural and linguistic affinity also throw more light on why this study is focussed on the Ikwo proverb. For example, Finnegan (1970) perceives proverbs as a highly prevalent and prestigious form of speech in Igbo society and other African societies. Penfield (1983) believes that proverbs are a tool for maintaining traditional norms and values in a sarcastic manner to redirect an erring individual. She identified a major function of proverbs in Igboland as that of using proverbs to express and imprint the realities of life on the minds of man. Therefore, the Igbo rely heavily on their proverbs to help reconstruct deviants and straying beings, and bring them back to the line of its morals and ethics.

Similarly, Nwachukwu-Agbada (1994) argues that the proverb is a very significant oral form in Igboland, a predominantly oral society because Igbo proverbs record the social history of the people in oral form. In this form, it records the history, experience, the trauma and the tension of a society at every stage of its evolution. Beyond capturing the social history of the Igbo society, Igbo proverbs convey the traditional worldview of the people. They can perform this role because of their deep philosophical contents, conveyed in their "connotative and subterranean" meanings (ibid, p. 194).

In his critical analysis of Igbo proverbs, Ukaegbu (2006) opines that Igbo proverbs are a vital heritage to its society in that it projects the Igbo philosophy as an agent of cultural and social control. They give insight to their cultural, social structure and traditional beliefs. They become

a very effective instrument of character moulding when a child is exposed early enough to the ethical standards of his environment through proverbs. This way he imbibes the social enlightenment to shape his thinking and relationships within and outside his immediate environment.

These eminent scholars imply that proverbs are an integral part of language and are highly valuable in all human societies. These views are significant to this study because many of them are results of researches conducted among the Igbo with whom the Ikwo society share close cultural and linguistic affinity. As such these views apply to the Ikwo as much as they apply to the Igbo. In the Ikwo society, proverbs are highly valued because they serve as a veritable tool for inculcating values in the minds of humans in a conversational manner during early developmental stages in such a way that emotions are stabilized, positive goal-oriented attitudes to life are inculcated and above all conflicts resolved. Proverbs are critical in attaining and directing judicious morals which are key to a stable Ikwo society. In short, it could be said that Ikwo proverbs are traditional vehicles by which thoughts resonate in the society.

However, what the above-mentioned studies share is their uncritical idolization of the functions of the proverb in any society without any attempt to ascertain whose views the proverb of that society represents. Do they represent primarily the views of the old or the young, those of the men or the women etc. This study is a departure from those mentioned above because it aims to critically analyse Ikwo proverbs to identify the views they express, whose views they represent and whether such views are suitable for transmission to the younger generation to save the Ikwo language and culture from imminent extinction.

It is the first of its kind to study proverbs as the repository of the traditional worldview of the Ikwo people of southeast Nigeria. This effort is of both academic and practical relevance. Academically, this is an under-explored area, and this research is expected not only to add to how much paremiologists know about this interesting form of speech art in general, but also how much the world knows about Ikwo proverbs. At the practical level, understanding the worldview of a people is very important in planning a programme of social orientation to guide the behaviour of such a group, especially in a world where a deviation from the accepted norms of behaviour of that society has given rise to social and moral decay as is the case with Nigeria now. The study will also enhance intercultural understanding and relations between the members of Ikwo and other cultures.

Secondly, it is hoped that research into the Ikwo proverb will help to save the language in which the proverbs are conveyed from the fate of imminent extinction awaiting many minority languages and cultures not only in Nigeria but many other parts of the world. This effort is very necessary because when a language and culture dies, a people's identity dies with it. The loss of the Ikwo language and culture would mean the loss of the distinct identity markers of at least the 260,000 speakers and practitioners of the language and culture (Lewis *et al*, 2014), because "the very processes that make a language and culture more complex, more localized and specific to a small group also make it more ideally suited to making a distinctive identity" (Nettle and Romaine, 2000).

One of the most important responsibilities of any culture is to assist its members in forming their identities through socialization, and one of the most important instruments of socialization is language. Therefore, the loss of a language and culture leaves the individual without any cultural institution or a language medium to socialize him into the norms of his society.

Because “people define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions” (Samovar and Porter, 2004, p. 84) people who have lost their own identity markers feel lost in the wider society. The sense of loss experienced by people who find themselves in this situation is better imagined than told. It is a sense of loss that goes deep into the psyche and affects the individual negatively for life. It is an experience which no child should be allowed to have.

On why their worldviews and values were chosen for analysis, Mmadike (2014, p. 98) argues that “since people view the world within their cultural environment and coin proverbs appropriately to explain all aspects of their traditional life and worldview...perhaps the quickest way to understand a people or a culture is to learn their proverbs.” And proverbs are the repository, the embodiment, the storehouse, the word barn or the library of the collective wisdom, history and culture of the people through which we can have a glimpse into their culture and their history, and through which it is possible to reconstruct or resurrect such a culture even if it were dead (Mieder, 2004). According to Samovar and Porter (2004, p. 85) “...worldview is the common English translation of the German word *Weltanschauung*, meaning overarching philosophy or outlook, or conception of the world.” In the case of the Ikwo society, it is the common philosophical thread pervading the entire repertoire of Ikwo proverbs which this study investigated.

Despite the importance of proverb knowledge, there is only very limited research on Ikwo proverbs. This is the gap in knowledge which this study intends to step in and fill. The study aims to analyse the proverbs of the Ikwo society to identify the Ikwo worldview as reflected in them, to determine whether identified worldviews were representative of all members of the Ikwo society and suggest reasons why Ikwo proverbs should be taught to children in schools and how. Specifically, this study aims to provide answers to the following research questions

1. Which Ikwo worldview(s) are expressed in their proverbs?
2. Do such worldview(s) represent the interests of all social groups of the Ikwo society?
3. Why and how should Ikwo proverbs be taught in contemporary school curricula?

To provide answers to the above research questions this study aims to:

1. Identify the Ikwo worldview as expressed in their proverbs
2. Determine whether identified worldview(s) represent the interest of all social groups.
3. Suggest why and how Ikwo proverbs should be taught in contemporary school curricula?

For this analysis I have linked two models - the Winick (2001) model of sorting proverbs collected for worldviews analysis depending on the views they expressed and the meaning-in-opposition view of thought (Levi- Strauss, 1963). Levi-Strauss's model was later expanded by (Leach, 1964) to include the “consensus” category of view. These two models were used because the shortcoming of one is remedied by the other. For example, while Winick's model helps us to identify only two broad proverb views, the Levi-Strauss model helps us to identify a third category of views, courtesy of the work of Leach (1964). Leach drew the attention of researchers to the hitherto omitted liminal category of views which belonged to neither of two opposing views.

My research was underpinned by Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1963) theory that social phenomena (language, words, culture, proverbs, objects etc.) reflect the dominant cultural constructs shared by members of a society, and that the only way of uncovering these constructs is to

analyse the logical relationships holding between these phenomena rather than focussing on each individual phenomenon in isolation. Lévi-Strauss was a linguist and social anthropologist who believed strongly that all social phenomena are held together by an underlying structure which must be discovered and analysed for a better understanding of any human society

My pioneer survey research on Ikwo proverbs which sits between linguistics and social anthropology combines questionnaires and interviews in fieldwork involving native speakers of the language who supplied the proverbs of the people as used in context for analysis, with a view to assessing the cultural worldviews of the people as reflected in their proverbs. It suggests further research on the Ikwo proverbs prior to their inclusion in a language and culture teaching programme, which might ultimately contribute to the saving of the language and culture from imminent extinction.

Above all, my project brings many contributions to the field of proverb study. It fills the gap identified in chapter two, namely, the paucity of scholarly research on the Ikwo language and culture. It is the first of its kind to bring the language and culture into scholarly limelight, thus laying the foundation upon which further research on the language and culture can be based. More importantly, the study provides the scholarly framework upon which the analysis of the proverb of other endangered languages and cultures can be based.

Also, the worldview analysis model used in my study was an improvement over the models used by earlier scholars because it combines two models - the Winick (2001) model of sorting proverbs into groups that expressed opposing views, and the structuralist view of meaning-by-opposition model which Levi-Strauss introduced into cultural anthropology (Duranti, 1997) to which Leach (1964) added the third, hitherto neglected category of view. This combination is significant because it led to the identification of a third category of views conveyed by a few consensus-oriented proverbs used by a section of the Ikwo society which did not belong to either of two opposing views identified by earlier researchers.

The combination led to the identification of a few consensus-oriented proverbs and views which represent the views of all social groups more than the previous two worldviews of earlier researchers in the field of worldview analysis. To achieve this, I explored further the idea of the “liminal category” which was introduced into the structuralist theory by Leach (1964).

The potential applications of this research are substantial. First, lessons learnt from the Ikwo worldview can be applied in other societies to enhance peaceful coexistence and social harmony between individuals and their societies as well as with their environment. The main lesson is that proverbs hold conflicting views on all issues and in all areas of human experience, and that these views polarize society and bring about conflicts which need to be resolved to reduce friction and foster peaceful coexistence.

Second, it provides the scholarly basis for launching a teaching programme for saving the endangered language and culture from imminent extinction. As noted in chapter one, the Nigerian National Policy on Education of 1981 provided among other edicts that, “government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community” (Igboke, 2001, p. 86) at the pre-primary and primary levels, but the policy is yet to take off 35 years after it was formulated due to lack of a teaching curriculum and trained teachers for the 519 minority languages in the country, Ikwo inclusive. This research provides the scholarly foundation for developing a curriculum for teaching not only

the Ikwo language, but also the other Nigerian languages, thus enabling the take-off of the implementation of the policy. My research, thus coincides with the category of research described as researches that serve to establish foundations for future planning or for future action (Thomas, 2003).

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one presents the background threat which necessitated this research and the framework upon which it is based – the threat of language and culture endangerment facing minority languages and cultures across the world. It explores the meaning and nature of the phenomenon as well as its causes and effects on minority languages and cultures. Using the available criteria for measuring language and culture endangerment, the chapter demonstrates that the Ikwo language and culture is in danger of extinction, and identifies the Ikwo proverb as an aspect of the language and culture through which it can be saved, hence the focus of the research on their proverb.

Chapter two presents a critical literature review of proverb scholarship in general and scholarship on proverbs and their worldviews. It identifies the proverb as an embodiment of a people's cultural worldview, elements of which can only be understood if viewed holistically and in relationship with others to unravel the overarching cultural philosophy pervading the entire proverb repertoire. The chapter introduces Levi-Strauss' structural theory and his semiotics as a tool for the analysis of these proverbs to unravel this philosophy.

Chapter three discusses the theoretical underpinnings, the methodological choices made for the collection and analysis of data for the study, and the reasons for such choices. The data used for this analysis was collected through questionnaires and interviews. To achieve this, quantitative self-completion questions were sent to literate respondents to complete and return to the researcher. The same questionnaires were administered to non-literates by the researcher in person as qualitative semi-structured interviews to ensure that data collected were representative of all social groups (Moore, 2000) of the Ikwo society. The combined method was also used in the analysis. Interviews were further arranged between the respondents whose proverbs were chosen for analysis for further clarification on their proverbs and their meanings. To validate the information from respondents, further interviews were arranged with the traditional rulers and other opinion moulders of the respondent's community to confirm or authenticate their explanations.

The fourth chapter presents and analyses the data collected for this study. The questionnaire data presents the distribution pattern of the proverbs among the groups that contributed them and the reasons for the observed patterns. The interview data presents the worldviews reflected in the proverbs. The chapter identifies the liminal category of proverbs and worldviews previously marginalized or unacknowledged by previous researches.

The fifth chapter discusses the worldviews identified and analysed in chapter four. The chapter assesses these data in relation to theoretical issues and how they contribute to the creation of new knowledge around proverb study as well as their potential contribution to a programme of Ikwo language and culture revival/maintenance. The significance of this study and its potential application to the Ikwo language and culture and other endangered languages and cultures of the world in general were equally highlighted.

Chapter One

Language and culture endangerment

Introduction

This chapter introduces the phenomenon which forms the motivational framework for this research – the threat of language and culture endangerment. It takes a critical and evaluative look at the criteria for assessing language and culture endangerment, and applies such criteria in assessing the endangered status of the Ikwo language and culture, with a view to providing evidence of its endangered status.

Samovar and Porter (2004) define language as a set of codes (oral or written) used by a people to record and communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings to others. The most important uses of language by a people is as a means of preserving their culture, and a medium to transmit it from one generation to another. Similarly, Jandt (2013) defines language as a set of symbols shared by a community to communicate meaning and experience. The symbols may be sounds or gestures, as in American Sign Language.

On the other hand, Samovar and Porter (ibid) define culture as a shared learned behaviour which is transmitted from one generation to another for purposes of promoting individual and social survival, adaptation, and growth and development. Culture has both external representations (artifacts, roles, institutions) and internal representations (values, attitudes, beliefs etc.). Jandt (ibid) defines it as the totality of a people's socially transmitted products of work and thought.

These definitions suggest that there exists an intricate relationship between a people and their language and culture, namely that language is the code for recording and transmitting culture, and that the people need their culture for their individual and collective survival. As such anything that endangers a people's language and culture threatens their very existence.

Language endangerment, language loss, language death and other such related terms are becoming increasingly familiar terms used to describe the socio-linguistic change now occurring on an unprecedented scale because of the forces of globalization. Intimately bound with these languages are the cultures and identities of the language communities whose languages are affected. Thus, language and culture endangerment is a worldwide phenomenon that has since the mid-nineties, attracted and kept the world's attention to itself. From north to south, east to west the story is the same. What is the story? The story is that the minority languages and cultures of the world are dying at an alarming rate and linguists, cultural anthropologists, language policy makers and language communities are not doing enough to stop the destruction of our linguistic and cultural ecosystem. There is fire on the mountain and people do not seem to be running fast enough to escape the inferno!

Tsunoda (2006, p.7) notes that "although it is not known how long humans have been using language, the number of languages reached its maximum about 10,000 years ago and has since been declining." Unarguably, language loss has been a common phenomenon in human history but according to him, "it has been accelerating since the colonization by European powers started" (Tsunoda, 2006, p.8). The aim of this chapter is to examine the meaning, nature, causes, effects, measurement and level of the phenomenon around the world in general and in Nigeria.

1.1. The meaning and nature of endangerment

Language and culture endangerment is a term used to describe the failing vitality of languages and cultures in terms of the character of its users and the domains in which it is used. The character of the users of a language and culture include their number, their age range and their geographical distribution, while the domain of use of a language and culture includes the number and range of functions which the language and culture performs.

Nettle and Romaine (2000) paint the picture of language and culture endangerment as a situation where only about four or five tribesmen remembered some phrases of a language, and only one spoke it fluently; a situation where the children of the surviving fluent speaker are unable to converse with their father in his native language because they had become speakers of another language; a situation where this last speaker is no longer able to converse in his native language with the remaining members of his community because they no longer understood him, and the death of such a man signals the death and extinction of such a language and culture. Even though they acknowledge that all languages and cultures change over time, the distinguishing factor between change and endangerment is “the rate at which they take place, and moreover how they conspire to eliminate what is culturally unique and distinctive about the language” (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 49) and culture. While language change may take place slowly over a long period of time and with little or no damage to the culture of the people, language endangerment takes place rapidly over a short period of time and tends to sweep away what is culturally unique and distinctive about a people.

From another angle, Crystal (2000, p. 2) sees an endangered language and culture as one that “has never been written down or recorded on tape even though it may have living speakers.” This is because such languages and cultures die as soon as the last speaker dies, leaving a vacuum as though it never existed. In fact, the language and culture dies even though the last speaker is still alive but has no one to speak it to. But an archived language lives on, at least in the archives even though its last speaker is dead, leaving hopes of a possible revival in the future. According to him, the cankerworm of language and culture endangerment begins as language shift and eats deeply into languages and cultures until they become endangered. They then lose speakers gradually until the last speaker dies. He cites the Caribbean Islands where the Arawakan and Cariban languages originally spoken in the Islands are now extinct as one typical case.

For Grenoble and Whaley (2006) language and culture endangerment occurs at that point in the growth and development of a language and culture where there is an arrested development or stunting of growth. From such a point, the fortunes of the language and culture nose-dive as it begins to shrink until it goes into extinction. In other words, it is the point in the interaction between a language and culture and its speakers where there is “a cessation of intergenerational transmission” (ibid, 2006, p.16). At that point, language and culture “moves from a relatively vital state to one of endangerment” (ibid). This happens because there is lack of enthusiasm among the owners of the language and culture to transmit it to the younger generation in their daily speeches and activities.

Austin and Sallabank (2011) perceive the threat of imminent extinction hanging over the heads of the majority of the world’s minority languages and cultures as obvious signs of language and culture endangerment. They believe that “at least half of these may no longer continue to

exist after a few more generations as they are not being learnt by children as first languages” (Austin and Sallabank, 2011, p.1).

Central to all the above perspectives on the nature of language and cultural endangerment is the fact that the phenomenon is a cankerworm. It is dangerous and should not be allowed to start because when it starts, it eventually leads to the death and extinction of languages and their cultures. The other fact is that it usually sneaks into a community as a benign illness, in the form of mutual bilingualism in which two languages co-exist mutually: one for the home and the other for wider communication. Gradually, the home language is relegated under the weight of the language of wider communication. A shift to the latter begins and moves uncontrollably until the home language is no longer used for communication even at home. Since the adults no longer speak the former to children at home, intergenerational transmission ceases, leading to the death and extinction of such a language. The cessation of intergenerational transmission is thus the hallmark of language and culture endangerment.

To drive home the reality of language and culture endangerment, here is what looks like a language obituary worldwide:

1. All the languages of the ancient empires like Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Etruscan, Sumerian, Egyptian, Meroitic, Cumbrian etc. are all dead in those places where they served as language of empire. In their home countries, their use has been reduced to symbolic in areas like religion and other social and cultural practices (Nettle and Romaine, 2000).
2. The Arawakan and Cariban languages originally spoken in the Caribbean Islands are all dead (Crystall, 2000, p. 24).
3. In western Europe, the following Celtic languages are in danger of extinction: Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Breton (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 4)
4. In North America, 51 of the over 200 Native American languages have disappeared (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 5)
5. In Australia, the more than 250 Aboriginal languages may all be dead by 2000 (ibid)
6. The following last speakers died with their languages on the dates shown.

S/N	Date	Speaker	Language	Community	Source
1	1777	Dolly Pentreath	Cornish	Western Europe	Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 4
2	1972	Arthur Bennet	Mbabaram	North Queensland, Australia	Ibid, p.14
3	1974	Ned Medrell	Manx	Isle of Man, Western Europe	Ibid, p. 2
4	1987	Roscinda Nolasquez	Cupeno	Pala, California	Ibid, p. 2
5	1990	Laura Somersal	Wappo	Pala, California	Ibid, p. 2
6	1992	Tefvic Esenc	Ubykh	Haci Osman, Turkey	Ibid, p. 1

7	1995	Bogon	Kasabe (Luo)	Adamawa Province, Cameroon	Crystal, 2000, p. 1
8	1996	Red Thundercloud	Native American Aboriginal Language	South Carolina	Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 2
9	2000	Marie Smith	Eyak	Alaska, USA	Ibid, p. 14

Table 1. Language obituary worldwide

1.2. The causes of endangerment

Many factors account for language and culture endangerment around the world. Some of the factors are natural while others are manmade. However, while the natural factors account for a few cases of language shift, the manmade factors are implicated in most of the cases. Of the manmade factors, Fishman (1991, 2001), Crawford (1995, 2007), Krauss (1992) and May (2005, 2008) argue that the most corrosive of them is the political: the unequal and unfair power equation that exists between the majority and minority languages that emerged during the formation of nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries. At that time, the ideology that a strong nation-state was founded based on homogeneity of cultures, race, language, territory and economy originated from Europe and America and was expanded to other parts of the world via colonialism (Barbour, 1996). As a result, some languages and cultures were arbitrarily chosen and made official while others were perceived as threats to the unity of the emerging nation-state and systematically hunted out of existence, forcing their speakers to shift to the favoured languages and cultures.

According to Nettle and Romaine (2000) language and culture endangerment occurs when people abandon their language and culture in response to pressures on their community. Such pressures may be social, cultural, economic and even military that force a people to abandon their language and culture. They argue that many instances of language and culture endangerment “occur under duress and stressful social circumstances, where there is no realistic choice but to give in. Many people stop speaking their languages out of self-defense [sic] as a survival strategy” (Nettle and Romaine 2000, p. 6)

Crystal (2000) categorizes the causes into two broad factors: factors which put people in physical danger and factors which change the people’s culture. Such factors include natural disasters which can cause the destruction of a language and cultural habitat or even if the habitat remains, the language becomes unsustainable because of the impact of such disasters. Economic exploitation and political domination of a language community by outsiders play a significant role in this process. He identifies a third set of factors as those that endanger the people’s language and culture even though they are physically safe and continue to inhabit their traditional abode. One such factor is cultural assimilation as happened in many places during colonialism and still happens today due to the influence of globalization.

Holmes (2008) identifies economic, social, political and demographic factors as well as the people’s attitude and values towards their language and culture as the main causes. While the economic, social and political factors push language communities into taking active steps to embrace a majority language and culture because of the advantages it confers on them, the demographic factors as well as the people’s attitudes and values leave the people unable

to take active steps to maintain or sustain their language and culture in the face of obvious threats. In other words, they take an active part in undermining their language and culture in the first case, while in the second, they watch helplessly as their language and culture slips through their fingers, often oblivious that it is in danger of disappearing until it is too late to do anything.

Finally, Grenoble (2011) places the blame on the shoulders of four factors: globalization, urbanization, social dislocation and cultural dislocation. While globalization and urbanization tend to bring people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds into a relationship that tends to linguistic and cultural homogenization, social and cultural dislocation are the consequences of this homogenization process. This process is what puts the less powerful minority languages and cultures in danger of extinction.

1.3. The effects of endangerment

First, when a language and culture is lost, the world loses a source of data for linguistic and cultural analysis. Different languages have different vowel and consonant systems. Compared with the English language, for example, we discover that some neglected languages have vowel and consonant systems that are far more complex than those of English and reflect a complexity of thought patterns and exciting ways of expressing them that are previously unimagined, but which when analysed may reveal the “many creative ways in which humans organize and categorize experience” (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 11). They note that though Ubykh, an extinct language earlier spoken in Turkey was thought to be the world record holder for number of consonants (having 81 consonants and 3 vowels only) it seems that some African languages have an equally interesting mix of consonants and vowels. For example, the Ikwo language has 39 consonants and 9 vowels (Ovuoba, 1999a). Compare these with the English (24 consonants and 20 vowels). It is also noteworthy that the diphthongs and monophthongs that exist in the English language, and which make the pronunciation of some words difficult for non-native speakers, are non-existent in any other language of the world.

Similarly, some languages express thoughts in ways that are different from the SVO (Subject – Object - Verb) pattern of the English. Nettle and Romaine (ibid) note that “about 10% of the world’s languages put the verb first, an example being the Irish language, while others put the object first, an example being the Hixkaryana language spoken in the Amazonia of South America.”

Beyond vowels and consonants, the world loses a language with a unique linguistic typology in terms of basic word order at the clausal level. According to Song (2011) the six major permutations of the basic word order that have been attested in major languages of the world are SOV, SVO, VSO, VOS, OVS and OSV. But the Ikwo language is unusual because it does not conform strictly to any of these six permutations. Like the English language, the Ikwo language uses the SVO pattern (Ovuoba, ibid) but unlike the English every Ikwo sentence (whether declarative or interrogative, active or passive) ends with an additional noun phrase (NP) in what looks like, SVO + NP, thus adding a transitive element to every sentence, even when such transitivity does not exist in their English counterparts. Consider, for example the following English sentences and their Ikwo counterparts:

1. English: This dog + bit + this man (S+V+O)
Ikwo: Nkuta wa + taru + nwoke wa + era (S+V+O+NP)

Translation: This dog + bit + this man + a bite

2. English: She/he + slept (S+V) (Intransitive sentence)
Ikwo: O + kuru + mgbenya (S+V+NP) (Transitive sentence)
Translation: She/he + slept + a sleep
3. English: Jesus + wept (S+V) (The Bible, John 11:35)
Ikwo: Enya-mini + agbakahuwaphu + Jisosu + l'enya (S+V+O+NP)
(Bayiburu Ikwo, John 11: 35)
Translation: Tears + welled up + Jesus + in the eyes.

The three examples above show that the Ikwo language (a) ends every sentence with a noun phrase which reinforces the verb of the sentence, and (b) introduces transitivity to sentences even where transitivity does not exist in their English or other language counterparts.

This loss is not restricted to loss to linguistic science but affects scientific knowledge and progress generally, especially when it is noted that some indigenous languages and cultures in many parts of the world “are verbal botanies” (ibid) having detailed knowledge not just about the plant species but animal species that are of both nutritional and medicinal values to man.

Secondly, a unique classification system of organizing indigenous cultural knowledge and categorizing the natural environment may be lost as we see in the case of the Dyirbal language spoken in Queensland, Australia. According to Nettle and Romaine (2000, p. 70) Australia is “a continent that has been inhabited for about 50,000 years, almost ten times the postulated age of the Indo-European language family which spread from its homeland across Europe and subsequently around the globe.” See Schmidt’s account of the noun classification system in the Dyirbal language which is dependent on knowledge of the traditional myths and cultural beliefs of the people (Schmidt, 1985b, cited in Tsunoda, 2006, pp. 77 - 97).

Thirdly, a group may lose a marker of a distinctive identity because the very processes that make a language and culture more complex, more localized and specific to a small group also make it more ideally suited to making a distinctive identity. The more different it is, the more it serves this purpose. “You are what you speak” (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 22). Similarly, the knowledge of who we are as individuals is uniquely encapsulated and interpreted within our identity and history (Crystal, 2000) and expressed in our language and culture. If we pursue that knowledge, we are bound to arrive at a better understanding of who we are. After all, “the desire to know about your ancestry is a universal inclination – but it takes language [and culture] to satisfy it. And, once a language [and culture] is lost, the links with our past are gone. We are, in effect, alone” (Crystal, 2000, p. 41).

Fourthly, a rich source of accumulated wisdom and knowledge of all humans may be lost. As a uniquely human invention, our language and culture makes us what we are as humans – our technology, our art, our music and much more. When a native language and culture disappears, so does “a trove of scientific and medical wisdom” (Nettle and Romaine, p. 70). And because each language has its own window on the world, one cannot be substituted for the other. As such “every language is a living museum of knowledge and a monument to the worldview it has been vehicle to” (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 14). When one language and culture is lost, its view of the world is lost and we need all the views to make a total and complete worldview. “The world is a mosaic of visions. With each language that disappears, a piece of that mosaic is lost” (Crystal, 2000, p. 45).

Fifthly, the loss of a language and culture means the loss of a source of diversity. The concept of an ecosystem presupposes a system in which all the elements that make up the system work together in harmony for the good of its inhabitants. Just as the biological system is formed by the interaction of all living organisms with the physical and chemical elements of their environment, the linguistico-cultural system should be one in which all languages and cultures are able to interact freely with all humans in the environment without any let or hindrance. The human ecology can only be said to be complete (diverse) if these two ecosystems, the biological and the linguistico-cultural are equally preserved. A threat to any language and culture is a threat to diversity needed for the evolutionary process of man to continue and because “evolution depends on genetic diversity” (Steve Jones, 1992, p. 269, cited in Crystal, 2000, p. 33), the strongest ecosystems are those which are most diverse.

As humans, “any reduction of the language [and culture] diversity diminishes the adaptational [sic] strength of our species because it lowers the pool of knowledge from which we can draw” (Bernard, 1992, p.82, cited in Crystal, 2000, p. 34). In a world besieged with violence because of perceived differences in colour, religion, opinion etc. experts are of the view that, “Difference itself is not a problem, but rather lack of respect for difference, its meaning and its values” (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 23).

Finally, we lose a link to our historical past because the words, idioms and proverbs of a people provide an insight into the earlier states of mind of its speakers, their history and the cultural contacts they had passed through. Words become part of the evidence of the social history of a people because “everything forgets but not language” (Steiner, 1967, p.131, cited in Crystal, 2000, p. 35). This is true of the English language and culture as it is of others because it is through the study of the foreign expressions and attitudes left in the English language and culture that we are reminded of the Roman conquest of 44BC, the Norman conquest of 1066 AD etc. of England (Baugh and Cable, 2012). According to Johan Van Hoorde, “When you lose your language [and culture] ...you exclude yourself from your past” (Crystal, 2000, p. 41) because according to Emerson, “Language [and culture] is the archives of history” (ibid).

In summary, thousands of languages and cultures have over time arrived at quite different but equally valid analysis of the world, and there is so much to learn from each that the loss of any one of them is a disservice to the evolution of the human mind. In a crisis-ridden world, there is need for a revision of our current ways of thinking, and who knows, a solution may lie in investigating the very languages and cultures most remote from the English, but which are at the verge of extinction.

1.4. Measurement of endangerment

The level of language and culture endangerment can be measured in the same way as language and culture viability. This is because on a linear graph, language and culture endangerment begins where language and culture viability stops. Many scholars have put forward many criteria for doing this. However, the most widely accepted of them are the Fishman (1991) 8-stage Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), the UNESCO 9-factor vitality framework (Lewis, 2005) and the *Ethnologue*'s 5-level scale (Lewis and Simons, 2010). But in 2010, Paul Lewis and Gary Simons (2010) collaborated to merge these three evaluative frameworks together to form a 13- level framework which they called the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) shown below.

Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (adapted from Fishman 1991)			
Level	Label	Description	UNESCO
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.	safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders	Safe
4	Education	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education	Safe
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generation and is being learned by children as their first language	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children	Definitely endangered
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation	Severely endangered
8b	Nearly extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language	Critically endangered
9.	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes	Extinct

Table 2: The EGDIS scale (Source: Lewis and Simons, 2010, p. 8).

The first two steps down the endangerment side of the EGIDS scale are levels 6b (Threatened) and 7 (Shifting). These two levels have in common that intergenerational transmission is in the process of being broken, but the child-bearing generation can still use the language. These languages are represented by the yellow bar in the summary graphs (Figure 1). As a class, they are referred to as "In Trouble" languages. Since parents can still use the language, it is not too late to restore natural intergenerational transmission in the home. It is possible that revitalization efforts could achieve this by focusing on the motivations of parents. The *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al, 2013) reports this to be the condition of 1,481 (or 21%) of the 7,105 known living languages.

The next summary category includes levels 8a through 9 which are classed as "Dying" languages. These languages are represented by the red bar in the summary graphs. At these levels, the child-bearing generation is no longer able to transmit the language to the next generation, since the only fluent users (if any remain) are above that age. Revitalization efforts would need to develop mechanisms outside the home to transmit the language. The *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al, 2013) reports this to be the condition of 906 (or 13%) of the 7,105 known living languages.

Finally, there are the "Extinct" languages at level 10. These languages are not represented in the summary graphs below because they have fallen completely out of use (even symbolic use), since no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language. With respect to extinct languages, the *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al, 2013) lists 377 of them since 1950 (when it began publication). This is a rate of loss amounting to 6 languages per year.

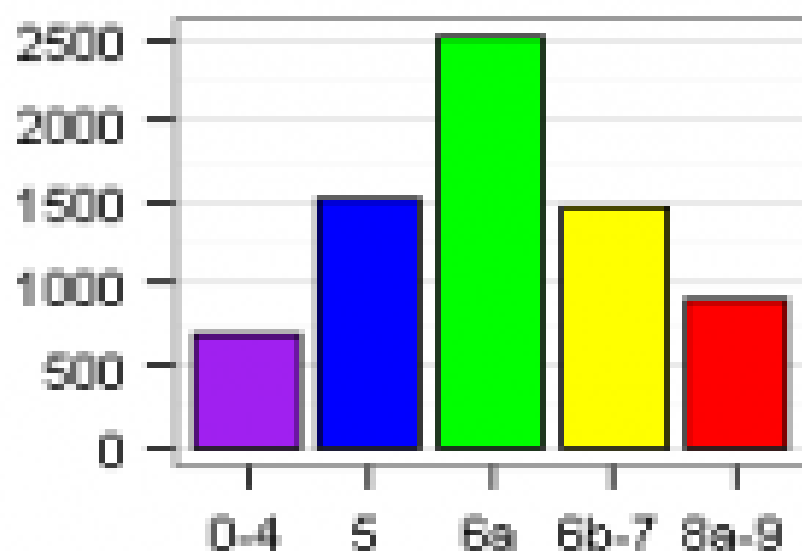


Fig.1. Language endangerment graph (Source: Lewis *et al*, 2013, n.p.)

1.5. Language and culture endangerment as a worldwide phenomenon

The most recent assessment of worldwide endangerment of languages and cultures is that done by the *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al, 2013). By using the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), they report that the world with a total population of 6,716,664,407

people has a total of 7,105¹ languages. These languages are classified according to their status in the continuum between development and endangerment as “institutional”, “developing”, “vigorous”, “in trouble” or “dying” as follows.

The “institutional” languages and cultures are those at level 4 and higher in the continuum as represented in the graph above (Figure 1) by the violet bar. These are languages and cultures developed to the point that they are used and sustained by institutions beyond the home and community. They include those classified as languages of education, trade, regional, national or international communication in the EGIDS. They are 682 in number or 9.6% of the world’s languages and cultures.

The “developing” languages and cultures are those at level 5 as represented by the blue bar. These are languages at the initial stages of development and have a standardized literature being used by some, though not yet widespread or sustainable. Such languages are 1,534 in number or 22% of the world’s languages and cultures.

The “vigorous” languages and cultures are those at level 6a as represented by the green bar. This level is the categorical boundary line between developed and endangered languages and cultures. Languages in this level enjoy vigorous face to face use in daily life by all generations. They are 2,502 in number or 22% of the world’s languages and cultures.

The “in trouble” or “dying” (endangered) languages and cultures are those at levels 6b or lower as represented by the yellow bar. They are languages which may have been previously at 6a but are now losing users. Together they constitute 2,386 languages and cultures of the world (in trouble, 1,480 and dying, 906). The above statistics can be represented in a table as follows.

S/ N	Region	Population	Living Langs.	Instit ut nal	Devlp ing	Vigor ous	In Trouble	Dyi ng
1	World	6,716,664,407	7,105	682	1,534	2,502	1,480	906

Table 3. EGIDS assessment of language and culture endangerment worldwide. Adapted from Lewis *et al* (2014)²

Informative as these figures are, they fail to give us an idea of the exact level of language and culture endangerment in terms of percentage of total world languages and cultures. This can be worked out by adding the “in trouble” to the “dying” (because these two together make up the endangered since the two embrace distressed languages from categories 6b – 9, short only of category 10 which are dead already) and finding what percentage it is of the total. By the above calculation, there are 2,386 endangered languages and cultures out of a total of 7,105 languages and cultures. This means a 33.58% endangerment level worldwide. If we extend this analysis to continents of the world it will be easier to appreciate the levels of language and culture endangerment continent by continent as follows.

Conti nent	Population	Livin g	Insti ttnal	Devlp ing	Vigor ous	In Trbl	Dyin g	End gd	% Endgmt
Africa	938,190,060	2,146	225	501	1,074	209	137	346	16.12

The Americas	900,743,578	1,060	53	233	131	307	336	643	60.66
Asia	4,115,950,000	2,304	224	376	841	685	178	863	37.45
Europe	728,096,620	284	81	61	45	49	48	97	34.15
The Pacific	33,684,149	1,311	99	363	411	231	207	438	33.40

Table 4. EGIDS assessment of language and culture endangerment by continent. Adapted from Lewis *et al* (2014)

1.6. Language and culture endangerment in Nigeria

The pattern of language and culture endangerment in Nigeria is like that in Australia because it is characterized not just by a shift to the English language (including indigenized English) but also involves shifts to other dominant regional³ languages and cultures, namely, Hausa⁴, Igbo⁵, and Yoruba⁶ (See Onwe, 2012). Secondly, both countries were victims of the British colonial language policy towards its colonies, and a tacitly negative policy characterized by lack of stated policy or support for local languages. Rather, such local languages were labelled as vernaculars and prohibited in schools and other public places. Children who spoke them were either punished or fined as a deterrent

Fafunwa, (1974, p.119, cited in Igboke, 2001, p.1), described the British colonial policy in Nigeria as “*laissez-faire*” because local administrators in consultation with the local Christian missions and their home offices managed the educational enterprise as best they could since the British government had no clearly defined policy on education for its African colonies generally and for Nigeria before 1925. So, between 1841 when the first school was established in Badagry in Lagos, Nigeria by the Wesleyan Methodist society and 1925 when the Memorandum on Education in British Colonial Territories was the first policy paper issued by the British government (84years), there was no coordinated educational policy for Nigeria. Even after 1925 the policies adopted were overall “ill-suited to the needs of the people” (Lewis 1956, p.11, cited in Igboke, 2001, p. 2).

On the place of the language and culture of the people in education the memorandum referred to Nigerian local languages as vernaculars. And even though it agreed that “the study of the educational use of the vernaculars and provision of text books in the vernaculars were of primary importance and qualified workers should be set aside for this purpose” (Lewis, 1956, p. 4) nothing was done to this effect. Rather, “the preparation of materials for the teaching of vernacular has been largely and sadly neglected and the locally produced primers which almost invariably treated vernacular as a foreign language rather than as mother tongue represented almost the only material available for teaching.” (Lewis, 1956, p. 4). As a result, the local languages and cultures received very little attention, and in many instances the use of the mother tongue was made a very serious offence.

Thus, began a process of endangerment of the languages and cultures of Nigeria right from the beginning of education in the country. And even after independence in 1960 the first indigenous national policy on education of 1981 states *inter alia*:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the education process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba (Igboke, 2001, p. 85).

This policy is a disaster to the 519 living Nigerian languages and cultures because it arbitrarily recognised the three majority languages and singled them out for learning at the expense of the rest. It therefore sacrifices the fundamental rights of those language communities on the altar of national unity which it sought to protect, thus signalling the process of language and culture shift towards the three languages and endangerment for the 519. To make matters worse the government made those three school subjects and encouraged the production of teaching materials for teaching and learning them but none for the other languages and cultures.

At the pre-primary school level of education, even though the policy stated that the government will "ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and to this end will: (a) develop the autography for many more Nigerian languages and (b) produce textbooks in Nigerian languages..." (Igboke 2001, p. 86), nothing of the sort has been attempted by the government.

Similarly, at the primary school level the policy stated that, "government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage, English." (Igboke 2001, p. 86). But the practice in Nigeria pre-primary and primary schools today is that right from day one in school, the Nigerian child is introduced straight to the English language both as the medium of instruction and a school subject. The mother tongue remains a neglected and endangered language and culture species.

A close look at the language and culture endangerment situation in Nigeria over the last decade shows that the trend is not much different from the general trend worldwide. With six geo-political zones⁷ and a population of 140,432,000 people (Lewis et al, 2014), Nigeria has the largest number of languages in Africa, 529 in total and the largest number of languages and cultures in danger of extinction, 62 in total (Lewis et al, 2013). However, as the statistics show, the level of endangerment is still far below the 90 or 60 or 50% estimated by linguists. As the table below shows, it is 11.87%.

Region	Population	Living	Institt nal	Devlp ing	Vigor ous	In Trbl	Dy ng	Endg d	%Endgm nt
Nigeria	140,432,000	522	22	80	358	20	42	62	11.87

Table 5. EGIDS assessment of language and culture endangerment in Nigeria. Adapted from Lewis *et al* (2014)

Good news is that the past decade has witnessed an increase in the number of languages being discovered and documented in Nigeria, thanks to the good works of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, USA, and the publishers of the *Ethnologue*. Following from this, there has also been a fall in the number of languages and cultures going into extinction as shown by the table below.

Year	Listed	Living	No Speakers	Extinct
2000 (14th ed)	515	505	2	8
2005 (15th ed)	521	510	2	9
2009 (16th ed)	527	514	2	11
2013 (17th ed)	529	522	2	7

Table 6. EGIDS assessment of language and culture endangerment in Nigeria in the last decade. Adapted from Lewis *et al* (2014)

The two tables above are not an attempt to paint a less grim picture of endangerment than the reality on the ground by excluding any distressed languages from its calculations. Rather, it is an attempt to reflect the reality on the ground by analysing the figures collected by the *Ethnologue* through actual field surveys, not from estimates by theoretical linguists. My calculations did not exclude any vulnerable/threatened language as explained earlier since the “In trouble” and “Dying” (endangered) groups embrace all distressed languages from categories 6b – 9.

What makes the endangerment situation less grim than predicted by theoretical linguists seems to be the fact that more is being done now than before by agencies like the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) a linguistics research institute based in the University of Oklahoma, Norman, USA, to discover and document hitherto undiscovered languages and cultures. The institute sends researchers overseas to document dying languages with a view to saving them from extinction. The gross effect is that even though language and culture endangerment is going on around the world, the discovery and documentation of new languages and cultures, kind of mitigates the effects and keeps the overall endangerment level below the level estimated by theoretical linguists. It does not indicate absence of endangerment and does not undercut research and other efforts to save endangered languages and cultures.

In 1965, the institute sent two linguists, Paul and Inge Meier to document and describe the Izzi language. The study resulted in the publication in 1975 of *A Grammar of Izzi⁸: an Igbo Language* (Meier, Meier and Bendor-Samuel, 1975). The result of that study was subsequently thought to apply to the other languages of Ezza, Ikwo and Mgbo with whom the Izzi shared similar cultural, ancestral and geographical heritage as the Abakaliki people of north-eastern Igboland, and the lumping together of the four languages into the Izi-ezza-ikwo-mgbo language. But ever since then the other language groups have continued to protest against that assumption of linguistic homogeneity and embarked on different journeys of linguistic development until 2013 when the *Ethnologue* unbundled⁹ the language into its four component parts, namely, Ezza, Ikwo, Izii and Mgbolizhia.

The Ezza language is spoken by 590,000 people across three states (Ebonyi, Enugu and Benue). The Ikwo language is spoken by 260,000 people across two states (Ebonyi and Cross River). The Izii language is spoken by 540,000 people across three states (Ebonyi, Benue and Cross River) while the Mgbolizhia language is spoken by 190,000 people across two states, Ebonyi and Benue (Lewis et al, 2014).

The subject of this study is the Ikwo language, one of the four languages previously known as the Izi-ezza-ikwo-mgbo language. They were unbundled into four distinct languages by the *Ethnologue* based on the usual linguistic criteria of existence of a huge number of words and expressions that are mutually unintelligible between speakers of languages that otherwise share some degree of cultural and geographical proximity. Similar considerations came into play in the 1970s when the Izi-ezza-ikwo-mgbo language was considered different enough from the Igbo language to stand as a language of its own (Meier, Meier and Bendor-Samuel, 1975)

On its own, the language has the status of 5 (developing) in today's (Lewis et al, 2014) assessment criteria for language and culture endangerment worldwide. This categorization implies that the language is developed to the extent that it already has a standard literature, whereas this is not the case. The only resources available for teaching the language to children are introductory reading materials developed by the Abakaliki Language and Literacy Trust in the 1990s for an Abakaliki language and literacy programme that never took off owing to lack of funding and manpower resources

The above categorization of the language is, therefore, over-bloated and unrealistic because it is much less developed than the categorization suggests. In fact, it is neither "Developing" nor "Vigorous". It is "In Trouble" and "Dying", falling squarely between categories 6b and 7 of the EGIDS because even though the language is used orally by some members of the child-bearing generations, some of them are not transmitting it to their children, nor is the language being taught in schools in the area, not even in nursery schools. It is, therefore, endangered language and culture species. This fact was confirmed by Ovuoba (2013) in an oral interview (See Appendix 6).

Summary

In summary, this chapter has examined how language and culture endangerment as a progressive deterioration in the health and vitality of a language and culture can start as a seemingly harmless mutual bilingualism and quickly metamorphose to language and culture shift, which if left unchecked will progress to language and culture death, extinction and loss. It also identified those natural and manmade factors that put pressure on a language community to abandon their language and culture, the consequences of doing so as well as ways of assessing levels of endangerment.

It found that language and culture endangerment is a worldwide phenomenon, affecting some continents, countries and language communities more than others. It also found that Ikwo is one of those language communities in Nigeria most hit by this scourge, hence the focus of this research on the Ikwo language and culture with interest in critically analysing the proverbs of the language to identify the Ikwo worldview as expressed in them.

Endnotes

- ¹ I think that the increase in the overall number of languages in the world is not surprising, but rather is evidence of the hard work the *Ethnologue* is doing in reaching and documenting hitherto unreached languages in the remotest and least accessible parts of the world as demanded by linguists by conducting actual surveys instead of mere estimates.

- ². The language figures quoted are obtained from the the *Ethnologue*, but the endangerment figures and percentage of endangerment figures arrived at are based on my own calculations.
- ³. At independence in 1960, Nigeria was divided into three regions, namely, Eastern Region, Western Region and Northern Region for the purposes of administration under the parliamentary democracy inherited from Great Britain. Each region was administered by a Premier, while the Prime Minister was the head of government and the President was the ceremonial head of state. The dominant regional languages are Igbo in the Eastern Region, Yoruba in the Western Region and Hausa in the Northern Region.
- ⁴. The Hausa language spoken by 18,500,000 people has about 10 dialects and is classified as Afro-Asiatic, Chadian, West language. It has the status 2 and is the de facto provincial language for the northern region of Nigeria (Lewis et al, 2013).
- ⁵. The Igbo language spoken by 18,000,000 people has about 30 dialects and is classified as Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Igbo, Igbo. It has the status 2 and is the de facto provincial language for south-eastern Nigeria (Lewis et al, 2013).
- ⁶. The Yoruba language spoken by 18,900,000 people has about 21 dialects and is classified as Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Defoid, Yoruboid, Edekiri. It has the status 2 and is the de facto provincial language for south-western Nigeria (Lewis et al, 2013).
- ⁷. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria divided the 36 states of the country into 6 geo-political zones for the purposes of adequate representation of all interest groups at the federal level. Each geo-political zone is made up of between 5-6 culturally homogenous states. But while the other 5 zones have 6 states each, the South-East Zone has 5 states only.
- ⁸. Alternative spellings include Izi, Izzi, Izii (Meier, Meier and Bendor-Samuel, 1975)
- ⁹. This official recognition came after many years of agitation for it by the different languages because of related cultural but significantly different linguistic features (See Lewis et al, 2013). This raises the issue of whether to proceed with this research in the compound language earlier proposed or to pick one of the languages, in which case my natural choice would be Ikwo because it is my language. Following from that, proverbs as an embodiment of the collective wisdom of our people would be a better subject of analysis as against folktales. This is because there is an abundance of it in our language and culture, and proverbs are usually compact expressions which are capable of great elasticity (expansion) when subjected to analysis whereas folktales are the opposite.

Chapter Two

Review of literature

Introduction

This chapter which serves as the literature review of this study will present a critical overview of scholarship on the proverb and worldview. In general, it will examine the meaning, nature and functions of proverbs, as well as issues related to researching worldviews through proverb analysis. It will examine Ikwo proverbs as a reflection of their worldview, thereby identifying the gaps in scholarship which this study intends to fill. It introduces Lévi-Strauss's theory of culture as a system of symbolic communication, and semiotics as the method of investigating it to identify the underlying patterns of thought that runs through it. It ends with clearly spelt out research questions which the thesis aims to provide answers to.

2.1. Overview of proverb scholarship

Proverbs exist in every language and culture of the world and have a “nearly universal distribution irrespective of time, place, level of technical and economic development” (Milner, 1969a, p. 200). They have been collected and studied for centuries as informative and useful linguistic signs of cultural values and thoughts. Because of their central role in depicting many aspects of the life of many traditional, non-literate societies, proverbs have attracted the attention of many groups of scholars ranging from those who collect proverbs (paremiographers), those who study proverbs (paremiologists) and more recently those who study all fixed phrases or phraseological units including idioms, clichés, twin formulas, quotations, proverbs etc. (phraseologists).

The earliest proverb collections date back to the third millennium B.C. when Sumerian proverbs were inscribed in cuneiform tablets as “commonsensical codes of conduct and everyday observations of human nature” (Mieder, 2004, p. xii). Since then, the Greeks and Romans have compiled major proverb collections, and the wisdom contained in proverbs has played major roles in verbal and written communication. The major religious writings of the world contain rich proverbial treasures, many of which are still in use today in many modern languages, having been handed down from generation to generation through oral communication or the written word.

In the 19th century, German scholars pioneered the efforts in proverb collection and publication. German scholars who have impressive titles of proverb collections credited to their names include Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, Hans Walther, Arvo Krikman and Ingrid Sarv (Mieder, 2004). It is worthy of note that their publications and other such publications that followed in the 20th century were mere collections of proverbs whose main aims were for documentation purposes and for comparison with proverbs of other cultures and language groups. Such collections did not go deep into the study of proverb meaning, and were only useful to theoretical paremiologists in their attempt to find international proverb types.

The shortcomings of such collections were that they usually listed texts of proverbs without their social contexts, and did not reveal their actual use and function that varied from one situation to another. This study is a departure from the above because it will not only collect Ikwo proverbs but will analyse them in context to arrive at their meanings.

The 20th century saw the emergence of theoretically inclined paremiologists led by the Russian scholars Grigorii L'vovich Permyakov, Peter Grzybek, Wolfgang Eismann, Zoltan Kanyo and Neal R. Norrick. These scholars pushed the frontiers of proverb study further by seeking to discover the basic linguistic and logical nature of proverbs based on logical, structural, semantic and semiotic considerations. By this means they tried to reduce the thousands of individual texts (proverbs) from one language (or perhaps eventually, more universally, from all languages) to a basic set of what can be described as proverb types. This set of scholars went beyond collecting proverbs (paremiography) to analysing proverbs (paremiology). They occupied themselves with such questions as the definition, form, structure, style, content, functions, meaning and value of proverbs. Scholars of this era believed that:

[B]y pushing around these small and apparently simply constructed items, one can discover principles which give order to a wide range of phenomena. Proverbs are the simplest of the metaphorical genres of folklore – song, folktale, myth, folk play etc. – and the genre which clearly and directly is used to serve a social purpose. By investigating the relatively simple use of metaphorical reasoning for social ends in proverbs, one can gain insight into the social uses of other, more complex metaphorical genres (Seitel, 1976/1994, pp. 137 -138).

From America, Archer Taylor pioneered a vigorous American interest in paremiology also in the 20th century, with the publication of his *The Proverb* (1931) and *An Index to "The proverb"* (1934). Taylor's publications dealt with definition problems, proverbial types, proverbs in folk narratives and literature as well as the classical and biblical origin of many proverbs. He introduced the comparative analysis of European proverbs and a comprehensive analysis of customs and superstitions reflected in them. He also investigated their content and style. Other paremiologists who shared Taylor's interest in paremiology and published profusely on the subject included Alan Dundes, Wolfran Eberhard, Stuart A. Gallacher, Richard Jente, Wayland D. Hand, John G. Kunstmann, Charles Speroni and Bartlett Jere Whiting. Many decades after its publication, Taylor's *The Proverb* is still considered to be the classical study on the proverb genre.

These scholars have published a significant number of dissertations and scholarly articles, many of which are published in the *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*. This annual bibliography of new and reprinted proverb collections which started publication in 1984 adds an average of one hundred items each year to other proverb collections around the world.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Wolfgang Mieder built on the foundations laid by Taylor and others and took proverb scholarship to scholarly heights never seen. He took a fresh look at proverbs that is based on the works of these paremiological scholars but that is also informed by the new scholarship of the past seven decades. Adding to this his extensive work in the field of paremiology, Mieder introduced considerable material and theoretical findings that were not available or known to his precursors. Unlike Taylor who tried to meet the needs of many European audiences through comparative analysis of proverbs in many European languages, Mieder's aim was "to lay out the rich field of proverbs to general readers of English anywhere in the world" (Mieder, 2004, p. xv)

However, most scholarly attention on proverbs have been focussed on European and American proverbs, with little attention to African, Nigerian or Ikwo proverbs. What exist on Africa are predominantly compilations of African proverbs, and on Nigeria there exist similar compilations of Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba proverbs with usually only minor attempts at in-depth scholarly analysis of their form and contents. The only departures worthy of mention from this unfortunate trend for the Igbo are the pioneering works of J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada, the African paremiologist of Igbo extraction who has analysed the origin, meaning and value of Igbo historical proverbs in his Nwachukwu-Agbada (1990 and 1998) articles published in the *Proverbium*.

Though many studies have been carried out on Nigerian proverbs (Messenger, 1959; Arewa and Dundes, 1964; Ojoade, 1983; Asayinbola, 2007; Abdullahi and Abdulkarim, 2015 etc.), studies on the Igbo are very important to this study because Ikwo is a subgroup of the Igbo with whom they share common origins and ancestry (Eze, 2011). Their language and culture is among the 30 variants of the Igbo language and culture (Lewis et al, 2013). Because of this linguistic and cultural affinity, it will not be surprising to find close similarities in worldviews among the two groups conveyed in their proverbs. Such studies on Igbo proverbs include Pensfield (1981), Nwachukwu-Agbada (1988; 1989; 1993; 1994; 1997), Oha (1998), Ukaegbu, (2006), Nwadike (2009), Mmadike, (2014), Nwonwu (2014), Nwankwo, (2015).

However, not all the studies mentioned above can be said to be scholarly analyses of the proverbs of the cultures they set out to analyse. This is because some of their analyses lacked convincing methodological approaches or theoretical underpinnings and could be regarded predominantly as descriptive accounts of cultural reflections in their proverbs (see Nwonwu, 2014). Others who had clear methodological approaches and underlying theories for their analyses only undertook thematic analysis of one restricted category of proverbs or the other. This is the case with the other scholars. Unfortunately, no similar analyses of Ikwo proverbs have ever been undertaken, hence this study.

During the past few decades, there has been an explosion of interest in proverb among anthropologists, folklorists, linguists, literary historians, psychologists and sociologists, during which time proverb scholarship has experienced an interdisciplinary and international expansion. Similarly, proverbs and proverbial expressions as part of the larger field of phraseology in general have come to be of major interest to scholars and students of verbal communication, popular culture and worldview. The appearance of many publications in the field of phraseology has added a boost to the field of paremiology since they both discuss the subject matter of proverbs and other fixed phrases (Mieder and Dundes, 1994).

Phraseologists consider the study of proverbs to constitute a subgenre of the larger field of phraseology. In their theoretical and pragmatic work, they are looking for universal patterns and for the basic nature of “idiomaticity, fixidity, metaphoricity” (ibid, p. xi) etc. They also deal with pragmatic issues such as how to deal with the lexicography of many fixed phrases in dictionaries as they relate to foreign language teaching.

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, paremiology has over the years attracted the interests of linguists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists etc. This is because for linguists of the nineteenth century, proverbs were the source material for the comparative philological study of rural archaic dialects; historians treated proverbs and other forms of

folklore as immaterial relics, surviving remnants among the peasant folk of the savage ideas and ways from which civilization had evolved; sociologists and anthropologists took interest in proverbs studies in the hope to find the reflection of national characters in these small pieces of public philosophies. But the main interests behind the study of proverbs was and remains the idea that the proverbs of a people would provide valuable clues about their character and culture, and open paths of communication between them and the outside world because proverbs most clearly and abundantly express the social thoughts of traditional societies (Mieder and Dundes, *ibid*).

Detailed field investigations of the concrete contexts in which proverbs are uttered have suggested that there may be laws or principles of usage governing the decision-making process and which results in the citation of one proverb rather than another. Regarding content analysis, there have been attempts to correlate proverb content with national character and to extrapolate worldview from proverbs (Dundes, 1975b).

However, no previous study on the Ikwo worldview has been carried out to the best of my knowledge. The only related study known to me is the Opata (1992) study on the Igbo worldview on speech. In this study in which he analysed 102 Igbo proverbs to identify the Igbo attitude to speech, Opata found that “it is obvious that the overall Igbo worldview on speech is decidedly positive” because of “the importance placed on speech art and on the democratic nature of most indigenous Igbo societies” (*ibid*, p. 199). The above study is significant to this study because the Igbo and the Ikwo share many cultural and linguistic features. But the scope of the study is too narrow, focussing only on speech to the exclusion of other aspects. My study is a departure from such narrow focus because it covers the people’s worldview on major areas of the lived experience. Apart from the narrow scope of Opata’s study, the result did not go beyond the identification of the binaries of “positive” or “negative” worldview, that tend to polarize society into two opposing groups. My study will go beyond those binaries to explore the possibility of reflecting the worldviews of those at the “fringes” of the society by producing consensus-oriented proverbs that represent their interests.

The need to study and understand the cultural worldview of traditional societies and minority groups has not waned among scholars but has continued to grow, accounting for why proverb collection and proverb studies will continue for many years to come. But before we go into this important function of the proverb, let us examine the proverb in general – its meaning, its nature and functions, and the Ikwo proverb with a view to determining whether Ikwo proverbs share in these features, and whether the criteria used in interpreting English proverbs can be applied to the Ikwo proverbs as well.

2.2. Meaning and nature of proverbs

Though proverbs may look simple, they are indeed a very complex genre of the human thought system. Lau *et al* (2004) note the paradox that a proverb is generally understood to be an epitome of simplicity and common sense, yet it turns out to be both complex and hard to define. The difficulty in defining proverbs stems from the fact that they do not conform to a neatly defined compartment because their form, origin, content, purpose, structure and application are so varied as to sometimes give the impression that there is no such single entity as a proverb. It is no wonder why a precise and comprehensive definition of the genre has been giving paremiologists a tough time.

For example, after making several attempts, Archer Taylor, a pioneer American paremiologist concluded that “a definite definition of the genre is an impossibility” (Taylor, 1931, cited in Mieder, 2004, p. 3) but that “an incommunicable quality tells us that this sentence is proverbial and that one is not” (ibid). Later in 1932, Whiting tried the “impossible” and came out with a very long definition with a very long list of requirements which a proverb may or may not need to meet to be called a proverb, part of which reads:

A proverb is an expression which owing its birth to the people testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth – that is, a truism, - in homely language, often adorned, however with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be. Some proverbs have both a literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two... (Whiting, 1932, cited in Mieder, 2004, p. 2).

Despite this difficulty, many scholars have attempted to reach a concise and universal definition. For example, a foremost American scholar, folklorist and paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder defines a proverb as:

A short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder, 2004, p. 24).

The above definition is certainly shorter than the first, more precise, yet more comprehensive and contains all the key elements shared by all proverbs be they English, German, Japanese or Ikwo. This study will predominantly draw on this definition as first draft working definition before I develop my own working definition later.

Many features stand out from the above definition. First, the fact that proverbs are short, generally known sentences is a design to capture as much wisdom in as few words as possible. This makes them easy to attract and keep the attention of the people to themselves, thus making them easily known or knowable. This is more so because they are sentences used by the folks as part of daily conversation in the culture which spawned them. Thus, every adult member of a culture knows a certain number of proverbs depending on age, sex and conversational skills. This gives rise to what paremiologists call the paremiological minimum, a set of core proverbs that a full member of society should know (Taylor, 1985; Mieder, 2004, 2008). They agree though, that not everyone is equally endowed with the skilful use of proverbs due to their complex nature and infinity in numbers.

Secondly, the contents of proverbs as enumerated above apply to all proverbs irrespective of language and culture. These include wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views. There is no doubt that proverbs contain these elements. The only usual point of controversy is that these wisdoms, truths, and morals are most times subjects of controversy, giving rise to the argument that proverbs most times convey controversial wisdom, truth and morality that are questioned by some depending on their individual circumstances and beliefs. For example, the English proverb,

Good fences make good neighbours (Mieder, 2003, p.155)

has been the subject of heated debates and controversy among different individuals, even from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. While some people argue that fences promote cordial relationships by defining boundaries, others believe that such boundaries sour

relationships. Even the view that proverbs contain traditional views can be disputed because of the dynamic nature of language and the fact that new proverbs find their way into the proverb repertoire of languages from time to time.

Thirdly, the nature of proverbs according to the above definition deserves our attention. They are said to be “metaphorical, fixed and memorisable” (ibid). For example, the “fence” proverb fits into this box just like most other proverbs. In it objects are used as metaphors for something else. In this case the fence is a metaphor for access or barrier. They are fixed in the sense that their wordings cannot be altered by individual users as they please. Users are expected to keep the order and sequence of words contained in a proverb, otherwise they alter the proverbs and their meanings. It is this strict adherence to their fixed nature that helps to make them memorisable after repeated use over a long period.

Fourthly, the continuity of proverbs is captured in the definition by the fact that it is “handed down from generation to generation” (ibid). This fact is true of all proverbs and accounts for why proverbs can be regarded as a chronicler of a people’s culture and their history as well as their worldview. Proverbs share other features in common. These include portability between languages and cultures, dynamism as they are continuously evolving with language and culture evolution, ambiguity because they are subject to dual interpretations. They are also quite often ironic, cynical and sometimes ambivalent in their expressions, just as some of them express conflicting and contradictory ideas.

Further on the nature of proverbs, Mieder (2004) informs that proverbs have appeared in oral traditions, literature, art and in popular cultures like films, cinemas etc. for centuries. However, because of a fundamentally oral tradition, most African proverbs are still in their oral form. This is particularly the case with Ikwo proverbs.

And a word on the sources of proverbs. Some proverbs are thought to originate from the thoughts and words of great people and their writings expressed in poetry, drama, prose etc. Such categories of people as prophets, philosophers, teachers and playwrights such as Jesus Christ, Confucius, Plato, William Shakespeare, Chinua Achebe etc. have made great contributions to the stock of proverbs in their time. An example is Lord John Russell’s one-line definition of a proverb which has become a proverb itself: A proverb is the wit of one and the wisdom of many (Russell, c.1850, cited in Mieder, 2008, p. 14). Other proverbs emanate from ancient stories such as folktales told by adults to children and passed from generation to generation. These two sources give rise to two broad categories of proverbs – biblical and folk proverbs, the latter being the focus of this study.

Milner (1969a) defines the proverb by identifying its characteristics which according to him include the following:

- (A) it is pithy, concise and easily remembered by the use of rhyme, rhythm, repetition, or alliteration; (b) it is vivid, homely, sometimes coarse, deals with people’s primary interest; (c) it singles out something abstract and universal based on experience and observation which might be stated literally or figuratively; (d) it sums up a situation by appealing to humour; (e) it is often linked to another saying which appears to give it life; and (f) its effect is to raise a statement from the ordinary to emphatic level in order to urge, teach, praise or convince, or alternatively, to warn, blame, restrain or discourage (p. 199).

Some of these aspects of the proverb identified by Milner concern the structure of the proverb (what they are), while others concern the function of proverb (what they do). Thus, there are two main approaches to defining a proverb. While some scholars have approached it from the structural perspective, others have approached it from the functional perspective. The following pages will discuss the views of scholars about the various structural and functional aspects of the proverb and end with a proposed definition which covers both important aspects of the proverb.

2.2.1. The structural approach

Scholars who view proverbs from this perspective try to identify the occurrence of certain markers which help to identify a statement as a proverb. They are the internal features which make certain statements proverbs whether they are presented in isolation and outside their contexts of use or even if they are heard for the first time. The features include syntax (the omission of the article, the use of certain sentence patterns and structures); semantic (the use of metaphor, parallelism, paradox, irony etc.); lexical (the use of archaic or old-fashioned words); phonic (the use of certain phonic markers such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, meter etc. (Litovkina, 1996).

In terms of syntactic structure, many scholars agree that generally, proverbs are short sentences that tend to convey their message in as few words as possible, while at the same time conveying as much meaning as possible, in a way that could be described as economical with words. They have been described variously as short and pithy or pregnant with words (Taylor, 1985; Lue *et al*, 2004; Litovkina, 1996). Lue *et al* (2004, p. 2) characterized them as “brief and pithy, wise and witty.” Taylor (1985) and Norrick (1985) argue that proverbs are pithy because they are figurative in nature and express multiple meanings simultaneously. Thus, one proverb can fit a variety of purposes and be used in a variety of situations. Pithiness also involves economy with the word as earlier indicated. Therefore, the shorter the proverb is the pithier it is because each of the words that make up the proverb convey more lexical meaning per word.

Another syntactic feature of the proverb is its completeness, in the sense that it can stand on its own as a complete sentence which makes complete sense. According to Whiting (1994, p. 45) “a proverb means a grammatical sentence expressing an idea complete in itself [sic].” When contrasted with other proverbial phrases and formulaic intensifiers, proverbs are “self-contained units with a moral weight of their own and an argument that is virtually self-sufficient” (Abrahams, 1972, p. 23). Thus, proverbs are different from proverbial phrases because they are complete in themselves and can stand as full sentences with full meaning, whereas proverbial phrases as their names imply are phrases that are not complete sentences, and as such cannot stand on their own. For example, while “*Easy come easy go*” is a proverb because it has an implied subject and can stand on its own, “*brown as a berry*” is not because it lacks a subject and cannot stand as a sentence. “Brown as a berry” begs the question, who or what is brown as a berry?

In terms of semantics, scholars agree that proverbs can convey many, even apparently contradictory meanings simultaneously (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1973; Seitel, 1976; Yankah, 1994). However, in terms of figuration in proverbs, scholars have pointed out that the distinction between literal and figurative meaning is a matter of degree, rather than an absolute dichotomy. They also agree that meaning depends on contexts in which a proverb has been

used. They conclude that though both prosody and figuration are common features of proverbs, neither amounts to a criterion for the definition of the proverb.

In terms of lexis, some scholars argue that the proverb is “rigid and fixed” in structure (Taylor, 1985/1931; Green, 1975). The assumption is that the proverb must be “frozen in time” so that the listener can immediately recall that a proverb is being used while listening to a speech act. However, Norrick (ibid) has noted that many proverbs have their variants even in the same linguistic community. Moreover, certain structural changes or lexical additions to a proverb help in the interpretation of the proverb and do not change the recognizability of the proverb. In fact, variability is a characteristic trait of proverbs; they can be added to, transformed, and abbreviated (Akbarian, 2012). For example, the proverb “*Make hay while the sun shines*” can still be recognized as such even if the form is changed slightly to “*It is while the sun shines that hay should be made.*” As such, fixedness is not necessarily a defining quality but it distinguishes the proverb from other free-phrase genres like folktales, riddles and jokes etc.

In terms of phonics, the poetic features of proverbs are a much-studied topic and many definitions refer to this aspect of the proverb as its defining criterion (Abrahams, 1968; Norrick, 1985). According to Norrick (ibid) proverbs have certain external poetic features and certain internal poetic features. The external features include rhyme, rhythm, parallelism, alliteration etc. The internal features include metaphor, pun, personification, hyperbole, paradox etc. However, while it is agreed that prosody certainly helps in rendering a statement more memorable, fixed in structure, and thereby increases its chances of becoming recognized as a unit in a language, it does not entail that all proverbs must exhibit standard prosodic structures.

Other features of the proverb include that they are generally regarded as true, are traditional in origin, reflect the age in which they are produced and used, and are usually in common use. Though proverbs are held to be true by the people, scholars are aware that the truth aspect of a proverb is contextual, not absolute. Honek et al (1980) assert that a proverb as a figurative statement is neither necessarily true nor necessarily false. Being a generalization, a proverb cannot be defined as “true” or “false.” One chooses a proverb according to the demands of the situation, not due to its universal abstract sense (Mieder, 1985, 1989). As “traditional items of knowledge” which arise in recurring performances (Abrahams, 1969, p. 106) proverbs are viewed as authorless, source less, and as non-literary, and their performance essentially verbal. In fact, tradition is the source from which the proverb draws its authenticity and functional power.

But the authenticity and traditionality of proverbs have often been used by certain sections of society to exercise power over weaker members. For example, there is suggestive evidence that elders have used proverbs that demand unquestioning respect of their opinions to lord it over the young, while males might have used proverbs that tend to propagate the inferiority of women to men to subjugate their women and treat them as second-class citizens. This study will suggest a more critical interrogation of proverb knowledge in schools and universities, which opens more space for consensus-oriented proverbs that protect the interests of vulnerable members of society.

Though the above structural features are important in appreciating the surface meaning and aesthetic beauty of proverbs, the functional features help us to appreciate the underlying deeper meaning of proverbs which this research has set out to do.

2.2.2. The functional approach

Scholars who view proverbs from this perspective try to define the proverb by focussing on the communicative and behavioural functions of proverbs (what proverbs do). They maintain that proverbs are not only linguistic structures, they play active social roles in the lives of both the speakers and the listeners. By employing proverbs in their speech, people wish to strengthen their arguments, generalize, influence or manipulate other people, rationalize their own shortcomings, question certain behavioural patterns, satirize social ills or poke fun at ridiculous situations (Mieder, 1993).

Scholars of the functional bent “view proverbs as the strategic social use of metaphor; the manifestation in traditional, artistic, and relatively short form of metaphorical reasoning, used in an interactional context to serve certain purposes” (Seitel, 1976, p. 122). Seitel further asserts that because these short and traditional statements are used as rhetorical strategies in a communicative event, they are used “to further some social end” (ibid, p. 124). This view is echoed by Yankah (1989) as true of Akan proverbs of Ghana and Nwachukwu-Agbada (1994) as true of Igbo proverbs.

Being conversation openers, discourse flavours, and dialogue closers, mature Igbo speakers introduce and conclude their viewpoints with proverbs not only to show their knowledge of tradition, but also to smoothen their argument, to sweeten the entire communicative event in a see-saw of views and counter views (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994, p. 194).

Based on functional criteria, scholars have identified many roles played by the proverb in the social life of both speakers and listeners. A review of some of these functions will be necessary here to highlight their usefulness to this study.

Firstly, proverbs promote social integration by validating culture, “justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them” (Bascom, 1965, p. 290). When people express dissatisfaction with some accepted aspects of life, a “wise proverb works as explanation” (ibid). In this regard, Nwachukwu-Agbada opines that Igbo proverbs can play this role because they derive their authority by “an appeal to traditionality rather than an appeal to specialists or auspicious persons” (1994, p. 197). They are generally regarded as true and as such enjoy the social approval of members of the society because “the Igbo sometimes see the proverb as an embodiment of truth which is why they employ it when they want to confer authority on their viewpoint” (ibid, p. 195). But as pointed out by scholars, the truth in proverbs is relative and depends on the context and strategic purpose the user aims to achieve.

Secondly, proverbs function as “pedagogic devices” (Bascom, 1965, p. 290) and as means of teaching morals and values to children (Boateng, 1983). Their educative functions include the proverb’s didactic, cognitive and corrective uses. Didactic proverbs are socializing in nature particularly for children in their formative years. It is because of this pedagogical and moralistic function that proverbs are mostly associated with adults who use them mostly in child upbringing (Arewa and Dundes, 1964; Yankah, 2001). For example, the Igbo proverb “*Nwata bulie nnaya elu, odu awuchie ya anya/ If a child throws his father up, his father’s loin cloth blinds him*” (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994, p. 197) aims to socialize the child on the relationship that should exist between the child and the older person by emphasizing the consequences of disrespect to the older person.

Thirdly, proverbs act as a means of exercising social control by emphasizing conformity with the accepted patterns of behaviour in a society (Bascom, 1965). As a “means of applying social pressure and exercising social control” (ibid, p. 295), proverbs are instruments that create and establish certain social norms of behaviour (Grzybek, 1987; Yankah, 2001). Proverbs that perform this function emphasize the need to cultivate such virtues as justice, equity, kindness, truth, respect, generosity etc in interpersonal relationships. They are “employed against individuals who attempt to deviate from social conventions with which they are fully familiar” (Bascom, ibid, p. 295) to make them to submit to social norms.

Fourthly, proverbs are used as rhetorical devices to embellish speech, to engage in verbal duels and to defend oneself in court (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994; Arewa and Dundes, 1964; Yankah, 1989) and for didactic purposes (Krikmann, 1985). Proverbs are used in everyday communication for some practical, pragmatic purposes, and in various circumstances. For example, among the Igbo proverbs are used to embellish speech to make them fun and memorable. The Akans of Ghana also engage in proverb duelling as a pastime, to make music and to defend themselves in local courts. In general, with proverbs, one can aim to provide an endorsement to one’s statements, express doubts, accuse someone of something, justify or excuse someone, mock someone, condemn someone’s behaviour etc. The rhetorical and didactic functions of proverbs have engaged the attention of many scholars, most of whom agree that the most important functions of proverbs are their didactic functions. Whenever a didactic proverb is quoted, a direct or indirect hint is given to the listener asking him for some behavioural change according to the situational or cultural context.

Fifthly, proverbs convey historical and cultural information. The proverb is still a predominant form of recording history and other cultural phenomena in traditional, non-literate oral societies. In such societies such as Ikwo where no written records exist about their past encounters with others and their socio-cultural observances, proverbs come in handy as a record of such accounts. For example, the Igbo proverb

“Ozu nwa bekee: ebulie ya elu ‘no, no, no’; ebudaya ala, ‘no, no, no’/ White man’s body: you carry it up, ‘no, no, no; you carry it down, ‘no, no, no’ points to the period of the white administrators in Nigeria who used to insist on being conveyed in hammocks borne by able-bodied Igbo men.” (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994, p. 196).

Another Igbo proverb: *“Ero gbagbuo nwa mbekwu, ihere emegbuo ala nwe ohia/ If the mushroom suffocates the tortoise, shame catches the deity which owns the bush...requires the same cultural explanation vis-à-vis the relationship between the tortoise and the Igbo deities.”* (ibid). In that relationship, the culture expects the deities to have done their duty of clearing the bush of the mushrooms so they do not suffocate the tortoise. However, to extract the historical or cultural information held in such proverbs, as the ones above, the context of use must be understood and applied for their intended meanings to be fully realized.

Other functions of the proverb in speech acts include their amplificatory and image-making functions. By their amplificatory function is meant that proverb use amplifies one’s position in a discourse; and by image-making function is meant that it raises or boosts the image of the user before his audience. The usefulness of the proverb in satisfying these personal (ego) needs in conversational, familial, and social situations makes the Igbo regard a knowledge and application of it as an important social and cultural acquisition. Through amplification the proverb broadens the perspective of a discussion through a correlation between context

situation and proverb situation, thus making the speaker's discourse broader and clearer (Seitel, 1976). The proverb also confers authority on the speaker's viewpoint because they originate from tradition and are widely believed to be "true."

Having examined the structural and functional features of the proverb in the light of existing literature, I will summarize the key properties of the proverb discussed so far to develop a working definition that will be suitable for this study.

In form (structure) though opinions may vary on the detailed structure of a proverb, many scholars agree on the following points:

- Proverbs are "short." Though shortness is a relative term, proverbs have the shortest form among the other genres of folklore.
- Proverbs are "self-contained" or "complete" sentences. As complete sayings, proverbs are semantically complete and meaningful sentences capable of standing on their own, even if we do not know the larger context in which they are used.
- Proverbs have "fixed forms." Though many proverbs meet this criterion, which makes them easily recognizable and memorable, variations in the number and order of words of a proverb is equally a common feature if it does not change its meaning.
- Proverbs are generally considered to be "wise" and "true." But as many scholars have pointed out, the wisdom and truth of proverbs depend on the context and the strategic goal the user wishes to achieve in using a proverb. As such proverb truths are not absolute truths.
- Proverbs are said to be "traditional" in origin. This quality is an important defining quality because it helps to distinguish a proverb from other current utterances and related genres whose authors are known.
- Proverbs are "poetic." Though prosody and other poetic features are common in proverbs, they are not necessarily defining features. Other genres share this quality with proverbs.
- Proverbs are "metaphors" and "figurations." These features are also common with proverbs, but can also be found in other genres, for example, idioms.

In function, all proverbs are said to have "didactic contents" directly or indirectly. In other words, proverbs are primarily used to teach, inform, praise, condemn, correct, warn, caution the listener on the need to conform to accepted social norms. Though this is a defining function of the proverb, other genres like folktales perform similar roles.

Therefore, taking the structural and functional features of the proverb into consideration, I would define the proverb thus:

A proverb is a relatively short but complete statement based on experience conveying traditional wisdom in figurative language to guide behaviour in a society.

This working definition is structurally and functionally adequate for this study because structurally, it distinguishes a proverb from other figurative or metaphoric expressions like idioms (which are usually phrases, not sentences). Functionally, it captures the communicative role of proverbs – to provide a guide to the accepted codes of behaviour in a society. If the above definition is accepted as correct, this study would have made its own modest contribution in the search for an acceptable definition for the genre.

2.3. Proverb and worldview

According to Samovar and Porter (2004) worldview is a culture's orientation towards God, humanity, nature, questions of existence, the universe and cosmos, life, moral and ethical reasoning, suffering, sickness, death, and other philosophical issues that influence how its members perceive their world.

Similarly, Jandt (2013) defines worldview as the outlook that a culture has concerning the nature of the universe, the nature of humankind, the relationship between humanity and the universe, and other philosophical issues defining human's place in the cosmos.

From the two definitions above, it is obvious that there is a strong link between a culture and its worldview because a culture's worldviews are often represented in "the totality of their socially transmitted products of work and thought" (Jandt, 2013, p. 9). Language is one of the most important means by which a culture records and communicates their ideas, thoughts and feelings to others. But by far the most important use of language is as a means of preserving their culture, and a medium of transmitting it from one generation to another. And the most enduring part of a culture's language is their proverb.

Beginning from the sixteenth century when the famous English essayist, philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon (1561-1626) asserted that "The genius, wit, and the spirit of a nation are found in their proverbs" (Francis Bacon, cited in Parker, 1963/1994, p. 259), many scholars have made vigorous efforts to identify people's cultural worldview by analysing their proverbs (Taylor, 1931; Whiting, 1939; Robinson, 1945; Parker, 1963/1994; Opata, 1992; Lister, 1994; Winick, 2001). Early attempts to extrapolate worldview from proverbs met with initial frustration, much like the early attempts to define the proverb. For example, in 1931 and 1939 respectively, both Taylor and Whiting met with frustrations in their initial attempts to extrapolate the American worldview by analysing their proverbs. It is no wonder, that Taylor pointed out then that the result of centuries of efforts to identify national or racial traits in proverbs were "insignificant" (Taylor, 1931, cited in Winick, 2001, p. 358). A few years later in 1939, the committee on proverbs of the Modern Languages Association of America of which both Taylor and Whiting were members wrote "We cannot hope to discover the characteristics of the Englishman, the Frenchman or the German by making a collection of proverbs" (Whiting, 1939, cited in Winick, *ibid*).

These pioneer paremiologists had experienced similar frustrations with the definition of the proverb¹. But with time these frustrations were overcome through further research. Their problem with worldview analysis was that they sought to discover worldview through a collection of proverbs made, perhaps, by an anonymous proverb collector instead of through personal recording of instances of proverb use in speech acts, and in context. They thus counted proverbs as items not performance, whereas the relative frequency with which a proverb is used in context in a speech event is a much better measure of the society's attitude to the viewpoint expressed by the proverb. In other words, if in a culture, the one proverb recommending communalism was spoken ten times more than the one recommending individualism, the culture would seem to be recommending communalism over individualism. This is the problem in worldview analysis that this study aims to solve by collecting proverbs in use in speech acts and in context. This way, proverb use as performance is emphasized over proverb as item.

Nevertheless, proverb scholars continued work on trying to identify worldviews through proverb analysis after the frustrations experienced by Taylor and Whiting, with a measure of success. For example, in his *Chinese Proverbs and their Lessons*, Lister (1994) collected a representative sample of nineteenth century Chinese proverbs and analysed them with a view to “delineating patterns of Chinese thought” (ibid, p. 242). He found that though many Chinese proverbs had literal resemblances with European proverbs, they reflected the unique Chinese culture in which they were grown. He noted that though “the most instructive coincidences between western and eastern thought are to be found” (ibid, p. 244), Chinese proverbs still reflected the unique cynical mindset of the Chinese, in which the pleasures of the world are given less emphasis. In his words, he “found that the Chinese held a somewhat cynical and worldly view of human nature, but piercing insight into it” (ibid, p. 245); and that their proverbs were “marked more by wisdom than by sweetness, for they have sprung from the heart of a hardworking, not too much rejoicing people” (ibid).

The major weakness of this study like that of others before it is that the study was done from collections of proverbs and analysed, perhaps in the library in Europe, outside of the cultural environment where they are made and used. The author may not be versed in the Chinese culture (not being an indigenous Chinese) and may not have consulted Chinese people about the philosophical implications of their proverbs. As such he could not have gone beyond the generalizing conclusions that he has made about the national character and worldview of the people as determined by analysing a limited sample of proverbs from the culture. As noted earlier by Taylor and Whiting, such studies came up with preconceived stereotypes about the worldview of a people.

Other attempts to extrapolate worldviews from proverb corpora did not take a holistic view of the cultures they studied, rather they focussed on one aspect of the culture or the other. For example, Parker’s (1963/1994) study of Spanish proverbs was focussed on identifying their worldview on humour by analysing the way humour is used in proverbs. He found that they made fun of even the most fundamental issues of life by joking about them. In their view, nothing should be taken too seriously. But beyond the humour lies a fatalism – a resigned acceptance of pain and suffering that is more stoical than fun.

Similarly, Kuusi’s (1967/1994) study on Finnish proverbs centred on the fatalistic traits found in their proverbs and its implication on their worldview. The study found that they willingly accepted that every aspect of their life starting from issues of life and death to marriage as well as fortunes and misfortunes of life were preordained by fate. From the large number of proverbs reflecting this perspective he concluded that the Finish, like the Spanish had a passive, fatalistic acceptance of anything that happened to man as pre-destined by fate. The time and manner of death were pre-destined and could not be altered. But the strength of the study lay in its discovery that proverbs do not only reflect culture-specific worldviews, but that such worldviews undergo historical shifts, accounting for the significant differences in fundamental philosophies of nations from one generation to another. Hence the need for periodic analysis of worldviews to identify such shifts. To buttress this point, he noted that the fatalistic tradition has diminished with the passage of time and has been replaced in many western societies with the concept of man being the architect of his own destiny or fortunes.

The attempt to delineate the Irish worldview from their proverbs by Robinson (1945/1994) suffered from the same shortcomings as those before it. The study was also based on a library analysis of proverb collections analysed independent of the cultural context of use, thus

rendering its outcome unreliable even before it is reached. Moreover, being an English man who belongs to a cultural tradition related to the Irish, the similarities between the proverbs of the two cultures will pose serious challenges to the researcher in trying to make out a distinct worldview for the Irish from proverbs that are similar in many respects to those of the English. The lesson here is that it is easier to identify the worldviews of small remoter civilizations in Africa and Asia with different cultural orientations than Europe and America. In the same vein, it will be more fruitful to study worldviews from close range and in context like the anthropologists do through ethnographic fieldwork, than to study large groups like the American or the English worldview from collections of proverbs detached from their context, through library research.

In Africa, apart from the Opatá (1992) study which focussed on the Igbo worldview regarding speech, there have been very few holistic studies on their proverbs with a view to extrapolating their worldview. The only exception to this trend is perhaps the Kobia (2016) study which undertook the analysis of the proverbs of the Swahili people of Kenya. The paper examined the socio-cultural and economic background that shapes the Swahili proverbs and their underlying meanings. The paper found that Swahili proverbs are used metaphorically as a repository of traditional wisdom of the people and a vehicle for articulating their worldview.

The most recent study on African proverbs is Agbo's (2018) study published online in the UK-based *Postcolonial Studies Association Journal* on the proverbs of the Idoma people of Benue State, Nigeria. Though the study's focus is neither the identification nor the analysis of the Idoma worldview, it treated the subject matter of the use of sexist proverbs by Idoma men to exercise arbitrary power over their women. However, this study is significant because it addressed similar issues of women's subjugation addressed by a section of my study.

Notwithstanding that analysing a people's worldview through their proverb is fraught with its own challenges, many successful studies have been undertaken by scholars to identify "dominant national traits and cultural attitudes" (Opatá, 1992, p. 187). For example, Opatá reports that earlier studies have been carried out to establish the worldviews of Japanese, Americans, Koreans, Africans and Indians on speech by analysing their speech-related proverbs. These studies found that the Japanese, the Americans and the Koreans have a negative worldview of speech while the Africans and Indians have a positive view of speech. In his own study in which he analysed 102 Igbo proverbs to identify the Igbo attitude to speech, Opatá found that "it is obvious that the overall Igbo attitude to speech is decidedly positive" because of "the importance placed on speech art and on the democratic nature of most indigenous Igbo societies" (ibid, p. 199).

The negative attitude to speech in Japan was attributed to the high population density of the country and the emphasis the Japanese placed on polite and respectful behaviour in established social relations. Compliance to social norms was valued more than speech (complaints/objections) etc. The reason for the negative attitude to speech in America was their perception that words undermine deeds, and as such should be minimized in social interaction. Though the Igbo placed a lot of emphasis on action and achievement as well as on respectful behaviour especially in dealing with the elders, their perception of speech remained positive because of the importance they placed on speech as an art, and the democratic nature of most traditional Igbo societies which encouraged freedom of expression.

To the best of my knowledge not many studies to identify the African worldview through their proverbs exist beyond the above mentioned. Like the proverbs of many minority cultures in the area, the Ikwo proverb is yet to receive any scholarly attention. This is the gap in knowledge which this study intends to reduce. The study aims to analyse the proverbs of the Ikwo society to identify the Ikwo worldview as reflected in them, and to determine in how far the identified worldviews are representative of all members of the Ikwo society and suggest reasons why Ikwo proverbs should be taught to children in schools and how. Specifically, this study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. Which Ikwo worldview(s) are expressed in their proverbs?
2. Do such worldview(s) represent the interests of all social groups of the Ikwo society?
3. Why and how should Ikwo proverbs be taught in contemporary school curricula?

However, identifying a people's worldview through their proverb is fraught with its own challenges. In the following section, these challenges will be examined with a view to overcoming them during the analysis of Ikwo proverbs.

2.4. Problems of identifying worldview through proverb analysis

The first major obstacle to identifying a people's worldview through the analysis of their proverbs is the primary theoretical and practical arguments levelled against this kind of analysis by the pioneer paremiologists, Archer Taylor and B.J. Whiting. Both argued that "our preconceived notions about national character always colour our reaction and interpretation of proverbs so that investigations of this sort always confirm our stereotypes" (Whiting, 1994, cited in Winick, 2001, p. 358).

The first point to make in response to this pessimistic view by the pioneer scholars is that as pioneers, they had little or no theoretical or practical help on how to approach the issue. As such they fell back on preconceived notions which naturally led to the formation of stereotypes about the worldviews without empirical evidence. This obstacle seems to have been removed by the emergence of theories and methodologies for the conduct of this type of research. Based on these theories and methods, many successful studies have been conducted by scholars on people's worldviews.

The next point to make here is that the emergence of scholars who are native to the cultures they wish to investigate will remove any preconceived notions about a culture which characterised the era when mostly European or American anthropologists went to investigate some African or Asian cultures with preconceived notions about such cultures. Their researches ended up confirming such notions, no thanks to the absence of clear cut theories and methodologies to guide them as earlier pointed out. For example, as a member of the Ikwo culture which I am going to investigate, I bring no preconceived notions about the culture to the study. Rather, being armed with clear cut theories and methodologies for the conduct of this type of research, I am likely to come up with unbiased empirical results, whose yardstick for validation is the lived experience of the people, of which I am part of.

The second problem of this type of research is that many scholars worked with proverbs collected and compiled, sometimes anonymously by missionaries and others who are alien to the cultures whose proverbs they were collecting. Such proverbs were collected devoid of any knowledge of the background context that gave them meaning, and subjected to library analysis without recourse to such contexts. Expectedly, the interpretations given to such

proverbs were flawed *ab initio*, and the conclusions arrived would be flawed as well. To overcome this problem, scholars recommend the collection of proverb samples for this type of study through ethnography, by which the researcher spends time with the people and observes and records proverbs as they are used during normal everyday interaction in speech acts. That way, all the conditions surrounding the use of the proverb will form part of the considerations that will help to determine the meaning of proverbs used to arrive at a people's worldview. But in this case, my growing up experience in the culture which I am investigating could be equated with the recommended ethnographic experience.

Thirdly, the scope of coverage of worldview studies tended to affect the outcome of such studies. If the scope of the study is too wide or too narrow, the outcome will be negatively affected. For instance, studies aimed at identifying the worldviews of such heterogeneous cultures as American, English, French or German are bound to end up with wide generalizations that do not reflect the multiplicity of views that exist among members of such large cultures. On the other hand, studies that focus on narrow issues such as the people's worldview on humour, speech, life and death etc. are too narrow to reflect the totality of the people's worldview. This problem can be overcome by limiting such studies to smaller homogeneous cultures, like the Ikwo, the focus of this study, while at the same time widening the scope of the issues covered to include all the areas or categories of human experience in the culture being studied. This is also the case with the scope of this study.

The fourth problem is perceived contradiction in the multiplicity of meanings of proverbs. While it remains true that proverbs acquire different meanings in different contexts and situations, Yankah (1994) has argued that what are often labelled contradictory proverbs by scholars are based on a superficial understanding of the dynamics of proverb use. He argues that the problem exists because people ignore the social context in which they are used. Once they are considered in context it will be seen that each opposing use/meaning of a proverb is a social strategy aimed at achieving a social aim in discourse.

If one deals with proverbs only as a concept of a cultural fact or truism, contradictions are easily found in any proverb repertoire, but once the proverbs are in contextual usage they function effectively as social strategies. In fact, the meaning of any proverb actually is [sic] only evident once it has been contextualized. Proverbs in normal discourse are not contradictory at all, and they usually make perfect sense both to the speaker and listener. After all, people don't speak in proverb pairs, unless they are "duelling" with proverbs as a verbal contest. Of the commonly known proverb pairs people will always choose that text which fits a particular situation [sic] best at a given time while ignoring its obvious counterpart at the moment (ibid, p. 128).

He contends that the problem of contradictory proverbs seems to be resolved when we realize that when two proverbs take two extreme positions, the aim is to advise us to take the mild/moderate cause and avoid excesses always, noting that proverbs advise expediency, which obeys no consistent precepts. "In fact, it is difficult to talk of contradiction between proverbs, since proverbs have more than one meaning. This character of the proverb increases its value as a rhetorical tool" (ibid, p. 134). Contributing to the debate, Opata (1992, pp. 195, 197) wrote: "Rather than perceive the existence of contradictory proverbs as an obstacle to a meaningful interpretation of a people's cultural outlooks, one should accept it as simply signalling a non-monolithic way of construing the world by a people" because "different peoples in different societies (or even within the same community) do not give the same interpretive meaning to the same act."

Today, with the availability of cultural theories and clear methodological approaches, it is possible to extrapolate the worldview of small homogenous cultures especially in Africa and Asia through the study of their proverbs. This is exactly what this study has set out to do for the Ikwo culture. The theory and methodology for achieving this will be the focus of the next chapter.

One major contribution of this study to the field of proverb study is that it addresses the fundamental issues of proverb analysis raised as early as the beginning of the twentieth century by Firth (1926a), explained and applied by Arewa and Dundes (1964) and analysed by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1973) and Seitel (1976).² First it treats the proverb as performance by collecting the proverbs in current use from participants who use them in daily interaction (Winick, 2001). Second, the proverbs are sorted out according to categories and analysed as signs that need to be interpreted using semiotics as an analytical tool to arrive at their deep cultural meanings (Bakhtin, 1981; Zhao, 2012). Third, being a member of the culture, I am investigating, I bring to the analysis my knowledge of the language and culture as recommended by Seitel and Dabaghi *et al*. In the process of the analysis, I critically interrogate cultural stereotypes and hegemonic ideologies conveyed in proverbs.

Endnotes

1. In 1931, after making several attempts, Archer Taylor, a pioneer American paremiologist concluded that “a definite definition of the genre is an impossibility” (Taylor, 1931, cited in Mieder, 2004, p. 3) but that “an incommunicable quality tells us that this sentence is proverbial and that one is not” (*ibid*). Later in 1932, Whiting tried the “impossible” and came out with a very long definition with a very long list of requirements which a proverb may or may not need to meet to be called a proverb, part of which reads:
A proverb is an expression which owing its birth to the people testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth – that is, a truism, - in homely language, often adorned, however with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be. Some proverbs have both a literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two... (Whiting, 1932, cited in Mieder, 2004, p. 2).
2. These scholars highlighted the need for the analysis of proverbs as performance (speech acts) and in relation to the cultural context in which they are used by a researcher who understands the language and culture he is studying. This is because as Seitel contends, “An investigator who observes proverb usage in a natural conversational setting and in his own language will define [analyse] proverb differently from an investigator whose data are collections of texts” (*ibid*, p. 124). Seitel’s view that an indigenous investigator is more suited to achieve set target in proverb analysis is echoed by Dabaghi *et al* (2010, p. 813) who wrote: “The translator should know the linguistic and non-linguistic features of both languages... because a proverb should be rendered with care to carry the same cultural conventions in the original proverb.” Furthermore, as Firth argues: “The meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given a full account of the accompanying social situation, – the reason for its use, its effect, and its significance in speech” (Firth, 1926a, p. 134).

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter discusses critically the methodological choices made for data collection and analysis, and how the choices made will help to address the research questions identified in chapter 2. It will elaborate on the overall methodological approach and research design, as well as the rationale for this. It will also provide more information about why questionnaires were combined with interviews.

3.1. Lévi-Strauss' structural theory and method

This study is based on Lévi-Strauss' (1963) structuralism as a means of understanding the structure and meaning of social phenomenon (culture). The foremost French anthropologist and linguist who strongly believed in the universal structure of cultures (whether developed or primitive) was one of the greatest intellectuals of the twentieth century. His works had profound impact not only on anthropology but also linguistics, sociology and philosophy.

Structuralism is a school of thought based on Lévi-Strauss' idea that there are deep structures within every society, which cause patterns that can then be seen across all cultures. Lévi-Strauss believed that these patterns were due to the unchanging structure of the human mind, which underlies all acts of human behaviour. These mental structures would then be considered the source of the social structures that people follow unconsciously. He argued that the human mental structure "metastucture" (ibid, p. 58) is in part created by a system of binary oppositions (light & dark, life & death etc.) which allow people to make sense of the world around them. He believed strongly that since all human minds work in the same way, all cultures have similar structures, and that:

Once the various aspects of culture have been reduced to their structural elements, relationships of opposition and correlation and permutation and transformation among these elements can be defined. Homologies between institutions within the same society or among various societies can be explained, not in terms of mechanical causality, but in dialectical terms (ibid, p. x)

In summary, his structural concept of culture suggests that:

- a. There are universal structures/patterns (worldviews) that underlie all human thoughts, actions and social life.
- b. That every culture is a collection of different but related symbols (e.g. proverbs) which do not mean much individually, but when combined they form a structure/pattern that is meaningful.
- c. That all human thoughts (e.g. expressed by proverbs) work by the rule of binaries and opposites, and that all cultures think in opposing binaries – good/bad, man/woman, young/old, life/death etc.
- d. That these binaries only make sense in relation to one another through the resolution of the conflict they engender.
- e. That these conflicts can be resolved through dialectics, the process of reconciling the thesis and its antithesis through their synthesis.

The above five points represent, to me, the key points Lévi-Strauss sought to make and upon which this concept will be examined and applied to this study. First, the universal structures/patterns which underlie all human cultures is suggestive of worldviews which is common to every culture. Though they are common to every culture, at the same time, the way each culture views the world might be unique or peculiar to each culture, hence the universality of worldviews and the uniqueness or peculiarity of each worldview. This suggests that to understand the worldview of each culture, the structures/patterns that underlie that culture must be studied and understood. This brings us to the second point of the concept.

The second point is that each culture is a collection of different but related symbols (in our case proverbs) which do not mean much individually, hence the need for a holistic approach in their study. The fact that culture (proverb) is a collection of symbols also raises the issue of the tool for analysing them. Clearly, the most suitable tool for analysing symbols is semiotics (the science of symbols) to arrive at their individual and collective meanings.

The third point is that all human thoughts (also proverbs) work by the rule of binaries and opposites. Thus, all human experience conveyed in proverbs tend to be grouped in binary opposition. For example, good is conceived of and understood in relation to its opposite, bad. The same goes for black and white, young and old, inferior and superior, life and death etc.

Finally, none of these binaries make any sense when considered alone. They only make sense when considered against their opposites. For instance, death does not make any meaning except that it signifies a passage from one extreme of human existence (life) to another (death). At one extreme, the human is active and conscious; at the other he is inactive and unconscious. These two opposite extremes of existence set off a conflict. For example, is it better to be dead or alive? Are the conditions of the living better than the conditions of the dead? Or are both conditions different sides of the same coin? If so, how does one experience influence the other etc? Only by a resolution of these conflicts (questions) can one arrive at the true meaning of both experiences.

In equating culture to language (e.g. proverbs) I draw from Lévi-Strauss' assertion that "language can be said to be a condition of culture" (ibid, p. 68) because:

...the material out of which language is built is of the same type as the material out of which the whole culture is built: logical relations, oppositions, correlations, and the like. Language, from this point of view may appear as laying a kind of foundation for the more complex structures which correspond to the different aspects of culture (ibid, p. 69)

Relating these points to the Ikwo culture and its proverbs, it seems to me that it will be a productive venture to assess the culture and its proverb based on these points.

1. The Ikwo culture, though belonging to the universal body of cultures, and the universal body of worldviews, is still a unique culture with its own unique view on the world (which this study aims to identify). This study believes that each cultural worldview if identified has something positive to contribute to the pool of world cultural worldviews, all of which are needed for a better understanding of each other for the peaceful coexistence of all. Besides, it provides anthropologists and linguists and other scholars with material for further research.

2. The Ikwo culture, like other cultures has a collection of proverbs (which is a collection of different but related linguistic and cultural symbols). Though each of such proverbs can stand on their own and make a unit of meaning, each such proverb on its own does not reflect the totality of the thinking of the people of that culture. None can on its own reflect the worldview of members of the culture. That can only happen when the individual proverbs are brought together and viewed holistically.

3. Ikwo proverbs like other proverbs group human experiences according to binary opposites. This makes it possible for them to be grouped into categories (Firth, 1926a; Finnegan, 1970) of human experience as proverbs of life and death, man and woman, etc.

4. The binary grouping of human thought conveyed in proverbs makes for easy analysis of the relationships that exist between these opposites, leading to a resolution of the conflicts that might be generated. The process of such resolutions lead to shifts or compromises that reduce intra and interpersonal conflicts, ultimately leading to social harmony.

Based on Boas's idea of the "originality, uniqueness, and spontaneity of social life in each human group" (Lévi -Strauss, 1963, p. 7) Lévi-Strauss concluded that every research on a social group is unique and should be restricted to the understanding of that group in its uniqueness: "To be legitimate, such [social] research should be restricted to a small region with clearly defined boundaries, and comparisons should not be extended beyond the area selected for the study" (ibid). The focus of this study on a small group like the Ikwo is to avoid the mistake of earlier researchers who focussed on large heterogenous groups and aimed at comparative analyses of cultures while losing focus of the unique characteristics of the cultures they were investigating.

Lévi-Strauss applied structuralism to examine many aspects of culture to identify the structures within myths, kinship systems and marriage rules in anthropological fieldworks carried out among Brazilians in the 1950s and 1960s (Harris-Jones, 2018) Regarding mythology, he argued that when broken down myths hold a series of units (mythemes) and the relationships between these units create understanding. In this sense, myths from all cultures could have the potential to create similar understandings based on these relationships of mythemes.

When considering kinship, Lévi-Strauss observed fundamental traits of the human mind; in addition to the fact that people follow rules, gift exchange is considered the simplest way to create social relationships which bonds the giver and receiver into a continuing relationship. He used these ideas to theorise that exchange is the universal basis of kinship systems, and the structure of kinship systems depend on the type of marriage rules applied (structures are universal, but their realisation is culturally specific). Lévi-Strauss' kinship model became known as "alliance theory" (ibid, n.p.) and emphasised kinship by law/choice, the opposite of this is descent theory which emphasises kinship by blood.

He tried to offer an overall explanation for cross-cousin marriage, sister-exchange, dual organisation and exogamy (where marriage is only allowed outside of the social group). He argued that marriage creates "social structures" (ibid) because it is generally arranged between groups, not just spouses, and the regular exchange of (usually) women follows the rules of reciprocity that create giver/receiver statuses that continue social relationships. Again, it must be remembered that structuralism is interested not in the family, but the relationships

between families that create social structures. This study will explore the relationships that exist between Ikwo proverbs and proverb categories to identify their types (logical relations, oppositions, correlations) etc. and the structures that underlie such relationships.

3.1.1. Criticisms of the theory

Although structuralism as a model for the study of oppositional categories as the bases for generating meaning across languages and cultures is recognised as an important anthropological theory, it has of course attracted criticisms. The first criticism against Lévi-Strauss's theory as an instrument for understanding socio-cultural reality is that the theory is "caught between ideology and science" (Nutini, 1971, p. 540). In other words, Lévi-Strauss is criticized for seeing reality both from the ideological and scientific perspectives at the same time. No wonder he conceives of lived experience as represented in symbols to be analysed using the science of symbols. But this criticism is at the heart of what Lévi-Strauss set to achieve by modifying structuralism as conceived by Saussure, his predecessor. In fact, what distinguishes Lévi-Strauss' model of structuralism from Saussure's is that he "abandons Saussure's empiricism for a strongly rationalistic position" (Foley, 1997, p. 98). It seems to me that Lévi-Strauss took a deliberate stand to take a rational view in the study of the human experience in reaction to the debate of the time:

The very inception of such fields as sociology and anthropology in the nineteenth century was characterized by a debate about the extent to which doing a science of people should follow the methods of a science of the physical world. Can we predict human behaviour in the same way in which we can predict the motion of solid bodies in physics? Should we be more concerned with what is unique about a group of people or with the features of their language or culture that make them part of the larger human species? Can we speak of scientific "laws" when we are dealing with human actions? (Duranti, 1997, p. 47)

My thinking is that Lévi-Strauss's response to the first question above would be a definite "no". To the second, he would choose the first option and to the third his answer would be another definite "no". My response to the above criticism is that it is not possible for any social theory to separate these two aspects of life because life is made up of both, with each often at the service of the other. Lived experience is a combination of the subjective ideal and the objective reality, each of which is needed to interpret the other. However, because this study is more cultural than linguistic and more ideological than scientific, it will rely more on the lived experience of the people than on scientific or empirical proofs as the basis for arriving at or confirming its findings.

As such, though Lévi-Strauss sought to propound a cultural theory, such theories were greatly influenced by the science of the language in which they were communicated as noted by Duranti (ibid, p. 49): "So much of our social life is conducted, mediated, and evaluated through linguistic communication that it should be no surprise that social scientists like Levi-Strauss used concepts developed within linguistics as tools for the study of culture."

The second criticism against the theory is that it is a conceptual system in which the "operational variables are largely unverifiable" (ibid). Critics argued that its main points were formulated in a way which could not really be proved or disproved. No evidence was put forward for the existence of the mental structures that are fundamental to the theory, they were

just assumed by Lévi-Strauss. In response to this criticism I wish to argue that Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is no different from any other socio-cultural theory in anthropology, and that the best way to prove any socio-cultural theory is to match it with the subjective lived experience of the people under study. If the lived experience confirms such theory then it suggests that the theory may indeed reflect reality; otherwise it does not. In other words, the greatest need of structuralism is to put it to test in as many languages as possible. This is what this study aims to do with regards to the Ikwo language and culture.

The most significant criticism, as far as this study is concerned is that from the British group of anthropologists led by Edmund Leach and Rodney Needham. This is because their contributions did not only criticise but also enrich the theory. To Lévi-Strauss's idea of strict binary oppositions, Leach (1964) added the idea of the "borderline, liminal category, partaking of both poles of the opposition, but belonging completely to neither" (ibid, cited in Foley, 1997, p. 102). Such categories of cultural practices that mark transitions between opposite ends of cultural experiences are present in African cultures and include such cultural practices as initiation rites that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood; mortuary rites that mark the transition from life to death etc. Between the polarities of childhood/adulthood, life/death lie the liminal category identified by Leach as a category of its own, partaking of both poles of the divide but belonging to neither. This study will aim to identify such category in addition to the polarities that might be identified while analysing Ikwo proverbs for the worldviews expressed in them.

Also, critical to this study is the thought process and model of classification of the human experience which is the backbone of Lévi-Strauss's (1963) theory. He acknowledges that the physical world can be approached from the empirical or rational perspectives. While conceding the empirical perspective to the more scientifically developed world, and the rational to the less scientifically developed world, he agrees that both perspectives will lead to an equally valid classification, analysis and understanding of natural phenomenon, be it language or culture. According to him, the thought process of the developed world is marked by the "science of the abstract" and that of the less developed world is marked by the "science of the concrete" (ibid, p. 98). Though these approaches to classifying human experience differ, the thought processes that give rise to them are the same, and the outcome of applying these processes to understand phenomena will be the same. The only difference between the science of the abstract and the science of the concrete is that the practitioners of the science of the concrete "classify things in terms of their everyday, overt sensible features, rather than the underlying abstract features" (ibid, p. 99) that the science of the abstract uses.

Having identified the classification and categories resulting from the above two systems as often quite different, but the basic thought processes that give rise to them as the same, Lévi-Strauss identifies these thought processes as the distinctive features of semantic opposition, which can be found in the phonetic features of structural linguistics as well as in the number of opposing categories in cultures. This study aims to explore both the construction of binaries and liminal categories in Ikwo proverbs. In relation to the Ikwo worldview, it suggests a certain focus on the liminal culture in between as the new culture of compromise.

Despite its shortcomings, Lévi-Strauss's brand of structuralism has been critically acclaimed for the innovation it brought into the analysis of cultural phenomena. In one of the most recent assessments of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, Jeanne Willette (2014) noted that though structuralism started at the beginning of the 20th century as a linguistic movement and a

vigorous means of understanding language by breaking down speech into the smallest possible units and organizing these units in opposing pairs and arranging these opposites into a network of relationships, it was Lévi-Strauss who brought structuralism home to anthropology and philosophy, and applied it to the analysis of socio-cultural relationships which is key for my study of Ikwo proverbs.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the merits of Lévi -Strauss's structuralism far outweigh its shortcomings. First, it is the first to formulate a comprehensive conceptual framework for the holistic assessment of cultures to identify both what all cultures have in common and what is peculiar to each. What remains is its application to as many cultures as possible around the world, which is what this study intends to do for the Ikwo culture. Moreover, this study is more interested in the substantive result that can be achieved using structuralism as a framework for a better understanding of the workings of socio-cultural phenomena than a framework for scientific enquiry. As such what is of utmost importance to this study is the ideological elements in Lévi-Strauss' structuralism and its value in the understanding of socio-cultural phenomena. I chose it for this analysis because it aligns perfectly with the nature of the Ikwo culture and its proverb, and looks promising as a basis for assessing it to extrapolate its worldview. Similarly, semiotics as an analytical tool lends itself naturally for the analysis since the theory identifies proverbs as signs that require interpretation to arrive at their meanings. And semiotics being a scientific tool for analysing signs fits the deal perfectly.

3.1.2. Application of the theory to identify worldview through proverb analysis

This study will propose a model for applying the five key points of structuralism to analyse proverbs to arrive at the view point(s) which they seek to express as follows:

- a. Collect a broad spectrum of the proverb repertoire of a culture.
- b. Arrange them into categories of human experience and according to the broad themes which they address.
- c. In each category, identify the proverbs that express opposing views on the same theme.
- d. Identify the liminal category by resolving the conflict generated by the opposing views in the category.
- e. Identify the dominant thought pattern(s) that run(s) through the views expressed by the liminal category as the one(s) that inform(s) their "consensus" worldview(s).

This approach arises from my personal reading and understanding of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. By bringing in the liminal category as suggested by Leach (1964) this study intends not just to identify the two opposing views suggested by Winick (2001) because either spectrum of views does not represent the whole view of a people. There remains the view in between, the view of the people occupying the liminal space identified by Leach (1964), and which he characterized as the "consensus" view. This study aims to identify the consensus-oriented Ikwo proverbs that express such consensus views using this combined approach, as its major contribution to research in worldview analysis. Such proverbs and the worldview they express will be identified in chapter four and discussed in chapter five.

3.1.3. Semiotics as an analytical tool

Semiotics is an analytical tool developed by Ferdinand de Saussure for the analysis of culture. It is derived from structuralism, a similar analytical tool also developed by the same person for

the analysis of language in 1959 (Chandler, 2007; Smith and Riley, 2009). So, while structuralism is used for linguistic analysis, semiotics is used for cultural analysis. After successfully applying structuralism in the analysis of language “as a system of signs” (Smith and Riley, 2009, p. 93) De Saussure felt that a similar science was needed for the analysis of culture, which was also a system of signs:

In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1959) Saussure raised the possibility of such wider applications. He suggested that it was possible to “conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life.... We shall call it semiology. It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them...linguistics is only one branch of this general science” (ibid, p. 94).

The choice of semiotics as the tool of analysis follows from Levi-Strauss’ view of culture as communication. And to say that culture is communication means to see it as a system of signs – the semiotic theory of culture.

This view holds that culture is a representation of the world, a way of making sense of reality by objectifying it in stories, myths, descriptions, theories, proverbs, artistic products and performances.... To believe that culture is communication also means that people’s theory of the world (worldview) must be communicated to be lived (Duranti, 1997, p. 33)

And to communicate such views, the sign systems in which they are conveyed must be interpreted through semiotics. In less developed societies as pointed out earlier, objective reality is still categorized in terms of binary oppositions using totemic objects taken from the physical environment. For example, such societies make use of such cultural polarities and totems as the clever tortoise/the foolish goat, the strong lion/the weak lamb, the earth/the sky, the hill/the valley to construct myths using a limited number of already existing characters, metaphors, and plots to make sense of the world in which they live. By using their physical surroundings, plants and animals, traditional societies aim to achieve the same objectives as the developed societies do by thinking in terms of the abstract concepts such as “algebraic equations or binary numbers” (ibid) Such characters, metaphors and plots are cultural signs that must be interpreted in the context of the cultures in which they exist to make sense of their world, in much the same way as the algebraic equations have to be interpreted to make sense of the “scientific” world.

3.2. Other theories and methods

Different scholars have applied different theories and analytical frameworks to categorize, analyse, interpret or explain culture, that is, “the practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society” (Barker, 2012, p. 7) as reflected in such a society’s proverbs. While some scholars approached their study from the linguistic point of view, others approached it from the cultural point of view (Smith and Riley, 2009; Barker, 2012). Similarly, both the data collection method and the analytical framework used to collect and analyse the data also vary among scholars (Flick, 2007; Gibbs, 2007). Those who are lucky to have an existing corpus of proverbs to work with use such corpora for their analysis. Those who are working on cultures that are predominantly oral must choose between the use of ethnography or the use of interviews and questionnaires (Flick, 2007; Gibbs, 2007; Blaxter et al, 2010) for the same purpose. In terms of the analytical tools the options range from structuralism to semiotics, pragmatics etc. (Gibbs, 2002; Smith and Riley, 2009; Barker, 2012).

For this study, I have chosen the use of interviews and questionnaires because being native to Ikwo, I already possess the first-hand experience that ethnography is meant to provide foreigners studying cultures alien to them. For the tool of analysis this study combines structuralism with semiotics because proverbs are organized according to patterns of logical relations, oppositions or correlations and use symbolic language which should be interpreted through semiotics.

For example, in 1945, Morris Opler, a renowned American Anthropologist conducted a study to analyse the thematic contradictions found in the cultures of people as reflected in their proverbs. He used ethnographic methods to collect data from two remote Aboriginal American communities – the Chiricahua Apache and the Jicarilla Apache - and applied Lévi-Strauss's structuralism to establish the underlying themes that informed the proverbs of the people.

After an extensive analysis of the proverb samples collected, Opler (1945) found that there existed multiple and conflicting themes within the same cultural system. Also through his analysis of the thematic contradictions and their connections with real life situations, he refuted the reductionist view held by Benedict (1934) and others that cultures are tightly integrated wholes, the content of which could be explained in terms of one leitmotif.

Opler's study is very important because it helped to explain the contradictions found in the proverbs of every culture as part and parcel of the internal workings of every human system contrary to what some other scholars would want us to believe, namely that proverbs tend to contradict and belie each other because they are products of primitive and confused minds, and are therefore not worth studying. Most importantly, though Opler's study did not focus on worldviews of the Aboriginal American communities, it is significant to this study because it confirmed that the themes of proverbs show the same contradictions proposed by Lévi-Strauss, and thus confirmed Lévi-Strauss's theory as far back as 1945. It gives me the confidence that if Levi-Strauss's ideas can be used to analyse proverb themes, they can as well be used to analyse proverb worldview.

Similarly, Giovannini (1978) carried out a cultural study of 192 proverbs from a remote village called Garre, located in Sicily, south- eastern Italy. The study also applied the Lévi-Strauss structural analysis model to analyse the 192 Sicilian proverbs to identify the dominant themes that underlay all the proverbs studied. In other words, the study aimed to uncover the dominant cultural constructs shared by members of a social group through their proverbs.

Data for the study was collected through ethnography, using participant observation method during which the researcher lived with the speakers and followed their conversations. When a proverb was used, the individuals involved were asked to explain the proverb's meaning and significance. Later, the proverb was recorded in Sicilian dialect along with notes describing the social settings as well as informant's interpretation.

The next stage was the rewriting of the proverbs in its original form on an index card with a summary of its meaning transcribed on the card's backside. The cards were then grouped into "bundles of relations" (ibid, p.325) according to what appeared to be an underlying similarity in their meanings. Informants who were native speakers were consulted to verify the initial groupings. In this way, the corpus of 192 proverbs was eventually divided into eleven thematic bundles.

The final stage was the analysis of the proverbs during which the logical relationships (similarity, contrast, inclusion, homology) holding between the themes were examined by the researcher relying on historical and contemporary ethnographic data to describe the significance of the thematic sets, both individually and in relation to others.

The study found that despite the inconsistencies and contradictions that existed among individual proverbs and proverb sets there were underlying structural relations between them. The result concurs with Lévi-Strauss's assertion that "dominant cultural constructs shared by the members of a social group are often unconscious and encoded in a variety of empirical phenomena" ... and "assumes that the most parsimonious way of uncovering these constructs is to analyze [sic] the structural relations holding between discrete empirical facts (here proverbs) rather than to focus on each fact in isolation" (ibid, p. 324). By going beyond the surface level meaning, it is believed that the underlying cultural themes, which may only be partially expressed by individual proverbs, can be delineated. While both Opler and Giovanni used ethnography as a method of data collection for their research and needed interpreters because they were not native to their research communities, my job is made much easier by being native to the culture I investigate. These advantages are significant because my cultural and linguistic insights prevent the loss of certain shades of meaning experienced in the process of interpretation.

Also, Beck (1979) undertook a cultural analysis of 3,644 Tamil Indian proverbs compiled by Christian missionary, Herman Jansen in 1897. The proverbs were analysed through content analysis informed by the Indian philosophy of body parts. Proverbs analysed were those that focussed on the human body and its various parts, and the aim was to understand the cultural contents of the proverbs.

The study found that the relative importance attached to parts of the body which proceeds from the head down to the legs and feet reflects the Tamil social hierarchy translated into the hierarchy of the human body parts. In this hierarchy, the head and trunk are regarded as superior to other parts of the body (51.9% of proverbs refer to them). This is followed by the body trunk (16.6%). The arms and hands are third in that order (15.4%) while the legs and feet are fourth (9.4%). The last is the skin and bones (3.3%). On why most body images in Tamil proverbs are negative, the study found that this is so because of the Hindi idea of the body as a transitory and inferior container for a trans-migratory life essence, and constantly depicted in negative imagery.

The negative references to the body in Tamil proverbs according to the researcher can be explained in two ways. First, the physical body is used as a metaphor for a society that is sick and imperfect. Second, the physical body is perpetually subject to physical aggression and attacks. As such, less emphasis should be placed on it, rather more emphasis should be placed on the spiritual self through engaging in more perfect goals of the Hindi religion. This is because the Hindus believe that the physical body is only a temporary home for the soul, and their extensive use of negative imagery lends a vivid concreteness to the idea that one's inner life must suffer if it remains bound to a concrete form. As a subject of study, the proverbs provide an excellent key to some of the more fundamental themes underlying Tamil culture and its body-focussed imagery in general. Beck's study is significant to my study because apart from having proverb analysis as its subject matter, it identified relationships of opposition at a different level – the opposition between the physical and the spiritual, thereby pushing the prospects of the application of the structuralist theory beyond the physical and extending it to

the spiritual. A similar theme is explored in my study under the proverbs of Death and the Great Beyond.

Weber *et al* (1998) regarding proverbs as cultural products (one of those collective products that store and transmit cultural wisdom) conducted two studies to compare how proverbs related to risk and risk taking affected the risk-taking behaviour of American and Chinese business men and women. It was an attempt to find a cultural explanation (as opposed to other economic or social explanations) for such behaviours. This is because of their belief that cultural values take on a life of their own and become an independent influence on the behaviour of members of that culture (Schwartz, 1992, cited in Weber *et al*, 1998, p. 171).

In focus was the degree of collectivism exhibited by members of the cultures in question based on Hofstede's (1980, cited in Weber, 1998) evaluation in which the US obtained the lowest, and China the highest scores. Compared with those in individualistic cultures, members of a collective culture will more likely receive help when needed, which is, they will be "cushioned" when they "fall" (Weber *et al*, 1998, p. 174). Therefore, collectivism acts as implicit mutual insurance against catastrophic losses, thus encouraging members of such cultures to take more risks than others. To the extent that different cultures differ in their concern about a topic (for example risk taking) it is believed that those differences should be reflected in the number and frequency of proverbs in that topic, that is, proverbs will be available to advise or warn or encourage people about behaviour in that area.

The methodology used was to read through an anthology of proverbs to two native speakers from the two countries under study and to ask them to pick out proverbs about risk taking from the number of proverbs in their culture. The study found that a higher percentage of Chinese proverbs dealt with issues of risk taking than those of the US. Risk taking is instrumental in this study in the sense that it provides a chance for a gain at the cost of a potential loss. It reflects a people's equilibrium between greed and fear. Weber *et al*'s study is significant because it studied another aspect of oppositional relationships – individualism versus collectivism, a theme also explored in the current study under the proverbs of Life and Living.

Gibbs (2002) employed pragmatics as an analytical tool to examine the meaning of utterances that have both literal and figurative (metaphoric) meanings, for example, proverbs. Citing the research conducted by Temple and Honeck in 1997, he agrees with the two in their multistage view of proverb understanding in which they found that it takes a short time for people to understand the literal meaning of proverbs, but longer to understand the figurative (metaphorical) meaning, if at all they do.

The study showed that people were fast to read the literal meaning of proverbs like:

The used key is always bright

to mean shining objects used to open doors. But it took longer for them to read the figurative meaning of the proverb, which is, that frequently used instruments or property retain their functional value.

A proverb understood literally is useless and a waste of the effort of the speaker and the time of the listener. To make the most of proverbs, they must be understood for their figurative values within the context of usage. That study also sets up two levels at which proverbs can be interpreted – the literal and the metaphorical. The relationship between the two levels here

can be said to be correlational since a proverb may be understood at either level, depending on the knowledge of proverb understanding possessed by the listener. However, while the above analysis is concerned with the levels of meanings relations holding within a proverb, the present study is concerned with the analysis of meaning relations holding among proverbs.

Asiyanbola (2007) undertook a syntactic and semiotic analysis of 18 Yoruba sexist proverbs in English translation. The aim of the research was to explain the proverbs in question with a view to bringing out their inadequacies about gender prejudices against women. The method of data collection was by oral interview, while the method of analysis was that first, based on their functional or semiotic values, the proverbs were categorized into four functional or semiotic classes. Then through both parallel word for word (PWT) and normal sentential translation (NST) the proverbs were translated from the Yoruba source language (YSL) (ibid, p. 63) into the English language. Finally, through linguistic explication the researcher could explain the meaning of the proverbs.

The study found that many of the proverbs studied (14 of them) were gender biased against women, while only 4 were gender neutral. This reflects the patriarchal structure of the culture of the Yoruba people whose proverbs were studied. He went ahead to formulate female gender tolerant or gender-neutral versions of the proverbs studied.

It is significant for many reasons. First it deals with sexist proverbs which sets up relations of opposition between the men and the women in many societies, a similar issue treated in proverbs of gender relations in the present study. Second, the proverbs studied have a common origin and common background in Nigeria with the proverbs of Ikwo people. Third, by formulating gender-tolerant or gender-neutral proverbs in place of the discriminatory ones, the research points the way to the formulation of consensus-oriented proverbs as suggested by Leach (1964) as a way out of the problem of proverbs that polarize society.

Finally, Zhao (2012) relied on Russian Bakhtinian theory to apply semiotics in the analysis of Chinese proverbs. This way he could study the essence of utterances (proverbs) functioning as ideological signs. Though he acknowledged that proverbs are of both language and culture and can be studied from either of the perspectives, his title suggests that he chose to approach it from the cultural perspective. My reading of the text though, is that he maintained a perfect balance between the two throughout the paper.

Be that as it may, the paper studied the relation of social proverbs to culture and how this influences the ideology of a people, especially in the Bakhtin Circle, where ideology is the totality of the reflection of natural and social reality in the human brain. It found a direct link between social proverbs and the deep structure of culture. It established that many of the conceptions that make up the deep structure are revealed in social proverbs; that consciousness takes shape in the material of ideological signs (proverbs). In other words, proverbs reflect deep structural abstractions and shape the individual mind where “abstract cultural concepts are transformed into concrete perception and behaviour so that culture can endure” (p. 2074). Zhao’s study is very important not only because it focuses on the proverb as the purveyor of a people’s worldview (the focus of the present study) but also because it treated proverbs as ideological signs and used semiotics as the tool of analysis. The present study adopts similar approaches in its view of the proverb and the tool of its analysis, and will draw insights from Zhao’s study in its own analysis.

The fact that all the studies reviewed made use of aspects of Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist theory of proverb meaning and his semiotics as the tool of their analysis recommends them as a tool

for analysing proverb meaning for this study because they seem to point the way towards identifying the Ikwo worldview as expressed in their proverbs. More importantly, combining Lévi-Strauss's ideas with Leach's ideas will result in the identification of the consensus category of proverbs and worldviews, missing in Winicks approach.

3.3. The sources of data

The data for this research is a corpus of Ikwo proverbs. In Ikwo, the use of proverbs in daily conversation is a verbal art (Bauman, 1975) highly valued in the verbal repertoire of the people. They show cultural erudition among the predominantly non-literate population which is a criterion for according respect to the elders considered to be the custodians of the people's culture. The sources of these proverbs are adult, literate and non-literate native speakers of the Ikwo language, men and women, old and young. The aim is to capture as much as possible, a representative sample of Ikwo proverbs from Ikwo people from all walks of life. As a matter of fact, neither the language nor its proverbs are taught in schools in the area. As a result, those who learn the verbal art do so either because of personal interest in the art or due to their closeness with the elders, considered to be the custodians of the collective wisdom of the people as contained in their proverbs.

Proverbs have been chosen as suitable data for this study because of their intertextual nature. As narrative language, proverbs are inherently dialogic in nature, being full of the words of others, historically transmitted, and which we apply to our present circumstances, and use to propagate a people's viewpoint (Foley, 1997):

Our mouths are full of the words of others, which we apply to our present circumstances. A superb example is the proverb. Proverbs are passed on from generation to generation in a quite fixed form to communicate an important moral or practical truth which pertains to a new situation. They are the words of others, recontextualized in our present now, to provide an interesting or important viewpoint on the present situation. They derive their power both from their formal fixed rather poetic structure and from their carrying a kind of folksy received wisdom, putatively widely shared public opinion (ibid, p. 361).

The notion of the multiple voices in dialogic texts (proverbs) that reflect the culturally, historical and personal perspectives of members of a culture is called polyphony or heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). It is this prior text or intertextual nature of proverbs, the multiplicity of the voices that go into producing them and the social history which they convey that qualify them as the index of the people's worldview, suitable for analysis in this study.

3.4. Methods of data collection and documentation

Questionnaire and interviews were used to collect data (proverbs) for this analysis. The reason for adopting this approach was to ensure the maximization of data collection efficiency. As a result, the quantitative self-completion questionnaire (Moore, 2000) was sent to the literate members of the Ikwo society to complete and return to the researcher. The same questionnaire was taken by hand by the researcher to the non-literate members of society, and proverbs elicited from them were documented on their behalf by the researcher in what can be described as qualitative semi-structured interview (Moore, 2000; Blaxter *et al*, 2010; Thomas, 2003). This way, they could participate in this research exactly in the same way as their literate counterparts, and to ensure that data gathered was representative of all social

groups of Ikwo people, irrespective of their sex, age, social status, educational background etc.

For the purposes of collecting proverbs for this study, the broad fields of human experiences were first grouped into six categories, namely:

1. Life and living
2. Death and the great beyond
3. Gender relations
4. The aged in society
5. Children and youths
6. Man and nature

The categories are based on the Firth (1926b) system of proverb classification by function. According to Firth, though it is possible to classify proverbs according to their form, content, subject matter or occasion of use, the system that relates the proverb most closely to the daily experiences of the people is classification by function. The system classifies proverbs according to the aspect of life under which they fall. Its high point is that it considers “the intimate correlation of the proverb with the life and thought of the people...the reality of the connection with native culture.” (ibid, p. 268). Moreover, the system also preserves the “organic relationship between the different groups and considers them as but integral parts of the unity of native life.” (ibid, p. 269). The system, which allows the grouping of proverbs into headings and subheadings, also allows for further arrangement of proverbs “according to their specific function, i.e. the purpose which they serve in that sphere of life.” (ibid). It was the system used by Firth to analyse the economic proverbs of the Maori of New Zealand that has enjoyed international scholarly acclaim until now.

To identify participants, 100 literate urban-dwelling native speakers of the Ikwo language, both males and females of all ages and social class were contacted through e-mail with requests to participate in a research aimed at collecting and documenting Ikwo proverbs to identify the worldviews reflected in them as a way to save the language and culture from imminent extinction. Their role was explained to them as that of supplying one proverb as used in context in a self-completion questionnaire survey (Moore, 2000; Blaxter *et al*, 2010; Thomas, 2003), and answering 10 questions about the proverb supplied. They were also expected to supply their personal details by underlining the personal detail options applicable to them at the bottom of the last page of the questionnaire. Finally, they were expected to return their completed response by e-mail, by post or by hand to the principal researcher (see appendix 7). This is a quantitative method of data (proverbs) collection whose aim is to collect data from the most representative sample of Ikwo people of all backgrounds, whose personal details can easily be confirmed from the questionnaire itself when completed and returned to the researcher.

Also 100 non-literate rural-dwelling native speakers of the Ikwo language, males and females of all ages and social class were approached by the principal researcher in person during one of his numerous field trips to collect proverbs from them orally. The contents of the self-completion questionnaire were explained to them orally and their consent obtained. Their oral proverb performance and their oral explanations of proverb meanings and uses were recorded by the researcher. This is a qualitative method for collecting data known as semi-structured interview method (Moore, 2000; Blaxter *et al*, 2010; Thomas, 2003). Its aim is to collect data

(proverbs) from the most representative sample of non-literate Ikwo people, whose data would otherwise not be collected by mailing the self-completion questionnaire to them without the accompanying visit of the researcher.

Equal numbers of participants were thus selected from both the literate urban dwellers and the non-literate rural dwellers to ensure balance in the representation of the two broad categories of Ikwo people. Similarly, the number of men, women, elders and youth participants in the two groups were also equal. As such the difference in the number of proverbs contributed by each group would ultimately depend on several factors including their interest in and knowledge of Ikwo language and its proverbs.

Altogether, 3 documents were sent to each participant, namely, the participant information sheet, the participant consent form and the participant data collection survey form (see appendices 4, 5 and 7). The participant information sheet contains all the information the participant would like to have about the research and their participation in it. For example, the sheet addressed all ethical issues associated with research including the assurance of the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants using pseudonyms, the protection of the rights of the participant in the case of any accidents for all participants including the principal researcher who undertook periodical visits to Nigeria for fieldwork. For the protection of participants, a risk assessment was done and no potential risks were found to exist.

Participants were also informed of their freedom to choose whether to participate in the research or not as well as their right to withdraw without penalty simply by indicating to the principal researcher either through e-mail or phone call. About data collected, participants were informed that they had the right to indicate whether their responses should be published or not. They were also informed that there were no financial benefits accruable to them for participating in the research.

The participant consent form contained information about the title of the research project, the names and contact addresses of the principal researcher and the supervisors, and provided further confirmations of the right of participants to ask questions at any time during the research, and provided a space to complete and return to the principal researcher in case they wished to withdraw from the research.

The data collection survey form (the questionnaire) provided adequate information on the research and instructions on how to respond and send the responses back to the principal researcher. For the researcher, the questions are meant to elucidate information that will provide useful hints during the analysis stage. For example, answers to question 1 will help the researcher to arrive at the possible literal and figurative meanings of the proverbs. Responses to question 2 will help the researcher to be informed on the context or situations during which the proverb can be used in a conversation, while answers to question 3 will tell the type of lesson the speaker wants the listener to take home from the proverb. This will lead the researcher to themes of the proverbs and the philosophical views or cultural values inherent in them as well as the lessons they aim to teach, the purposes they aim to achieve or the points they aim to prove or establish.

To gain a deeper understanding of the proverbs, question 4 aims to extract from the respondent the possible historical, social and natural origin or background to the proverbs, while responses to question 5 will help the researcher to determine whether the historical

facts, the social situation and the language and culture habitats which informed the proverb have changed or not. Questions 6 and 7 are meant to gauge the currency or frequency of use of the proverb under consideration, and if they have been replaced, by which proverb(s). Questions 8 and 9 aim to harvest proverbs that are like, or contradict the proverb in question. Finally, question ten aims to harvest any other proverb(s) not captured in response to all the questions above.

If all 200 participants answer the 10 questions contained in the survey as expected, each participant will end up giving at least two proverbs to the researcher as follows: one proverb in the main questionnaire box; one proverb each in response to any of the other question. As such, 200 participants will provide at least 400 proverbs, enough for a pioneer survey study (Moore, 2000) of this nature.

3.5. Methods of presentation and analysis

Data presentation follows the format of parallel free translation and morpheme-by-morpheme gloss under the original proverb, and presented in three lines (Durant, 1997). In the first line, the Ikwo proverb is presented in its original form in the Ikwo language. In the second line, the literal, morpheme-by-morpheme translation is presented. In the third line, the free English translation is given.

Proverb analysis follows the functional perspective of proverbs discussed in the review of literature, as used in actual conversation by my respondents. From this perspective, emphasis is placed on “performance” as different from “reporting” proverbs. Whereas performance shows the artistic, linguistic and cultural ability and possibility to effectively quote proverbs during normal, natural, and ordinary speech, as reflection of an individual’s “quoting behaviour” (Penfield, 1981, p. 309), reporting on the other hand, which does not correspond to actual use (Penfield and Duru, 1988; Yankah, 1982) refers to the tendency of certain social groups to show knowledge of more or less proverbs than others, for example, men more than women or the elderly more than the young as shown by the quantitative data in chapter five.

This approach is informed by the theories of “folklore as performance” (Bouman, 1975; Hyme, 1962) and “ethnography of speaking” (Seitel, 1976; Arewa and Dundes, 1964) both of which argue that proverbs are far from being completely “fixed” and “frozen” sayings. Rather, proverb speaking is a performance in context during which a speaker can choose or reject to use a proverb, may be stressing certain aspects of it or manipulating fixed sayings to suit their own interests at stake at the time of interaction. Due to the metaphorical and figurative language that makes up proverbial language, it is possible for the speaker to transform its meaning according to the situational requirement. The meaning of a proverb is negotiable, constrained, and conditioned by strategic and contextual factors (Yankah, 1983). While proverbs as “texts” seem to present a more fixed view of reality, proverbs as “performance in context” suggest that different speakers may use proverbs for different purposes, as strategies to establish their ethnic or gendered identities, and to negotiate power based on the age, gender, class and ethnicity of the interlocutors.

But proverb knowledge does not necessarily correspond to actual proverb usage. In this analysis, proverb performance will attempt to give account of how participants use proverbs in naturally occurring conversations during my interviews with them, or their ability to recall a proverb and say, for example, that their father or mother used such and such a proverb in

such and such a situation in the past. By this, I aim to distinguish the reporting of proverbs described in presenting the quantitative data from the actual use of proverbs discussed in presenting the qualitative data. However, it is worthy to note that the quantity of proverbs participants report does correlate to their overall knowledge of proverbs, and may give an indication of their actual competence in proverb performance.

Worldview analysis follows the structuralist view of meaning-by-opposition which Lévi-Strauss introduced into cultural anthropology (Duranti, 1997). The notion of meaning-in-opposition in a culture and possible variations within the same culture is suitable for the Ikwo culture characterized by dualisms or binary oppositions as we see between the living and the dead, the young and the old, men and women etc.

The notion of meaning-by-opposition which derives from Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism is based on the idea that meaning lies in the kind of relations that signs (words, proverbs, objects) have with one another in a system (language system, cultural system etc.). Signs can be analysed to discover either the syntagmatic (horizontal) relations or paradigmatic (vertical) relations with others. When signs are analysed for their syntagmatic relations, the aim is to understand their temporal or spatial connection with other similar signs with which they appear side by side. Saussure defines syntagmatic relations as relations of contiguity (or relations in *presentia*). In a sentence, signs (words) acquire meaning by being next to other words. For example, the meaning of the word "draw" depends on the meaning of the other words with which it is used in (1) Draw water from the well and (2) Draw a well full of water. Syntagmatic analyses yield surface, superficial or aesthetic meanings.

On the other hand, signs can be analysed for their paradigmatic relations, the aim being to understand them in opposition to other similar signs that could have been used in their place, but were not. Saussure defines paradigmatic relations as oppositional relations (or relations in *absentia*). They are relations defined by what is not, that is, the range of alternative signs within the system but which were not used. In the sentence, Chioma is a pretty girl, the sign "pretty" acquires its meaning in relation to the opposite word "ugly" which was not used. The choice of "pretty" must also be seen not only in the contrast to "ugly" but also in relation to other similar words such as "beautiful". Paradigmatic analyses yield deep, metaphorical, philosophical meanings.

The structuralist view of meaning recommends itself for the analysis of Ikwo proverbs with its apparent contradictions, which can only be understood in relation to each other, and in relation to the socio-cultural environment in which they are produced and used. Its view of phenomena (words, proverbs, rituals, gestures, objects etc.) as signs also recommend semiotics (the science of signs) as the tool for the analysis of the proverbs which are usually metaphors representing something else, usually of deep, cultural, philosophical significance

Summary

In summary, this chapter examined the cultural theories and analytical frameworks available for analysing proverbs as applied by scholars to analyse proverbs from Europe, America, Africa and Asia. It also assessed the research method options, the data collection and data analysis options available for conducting research in this field of study.

It found Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory and semiotics as tool of interpreting culture attractive enough to follow because they point the way forward in the efforts to discover the

Ikwo worldview as expressed in their proverbs. Moreover, they see proverbs as ideological signs that need to be interpreted to get to their deep meanings.

Chapter Four

Ikwo proverbs: analysis and findings

Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses data (proverbs) collected for this study, first questionnaire data and then interview data. Questionnaire data is presented statistically to show the pattern of reporting of proverbs by members of the different social groups that make up the Ikwo society. Attempts were made to account for the observed pattern of proverb reporting among the identified social groups. Interview data presentation follows the Duranti (1997) format of morpheme-by-morpheme gloss under the original, followed by the free English translation, presented in three lines. The chapter identifies the liminal category of proverbs and worldviews marginalized or not acknowledged by previous researches.

Data analysis follows the functional perspective of proverbs as used in actual conversation, which places emphasis on performance as different from reporting proverbs. The above presentation style was discussed in the research methodology chapter while the analytical perspective was identified and discussed in the review of literature and research methodology chapters.

This chapter attempts to extrapolate the worldview expressed in Ikwo proverbs using Lévi-Strauss' structuralist view of meaning-in-opposition discussed in the research methodology chapter and the worldview identification model which derives from it. The "liminal category" of view contributed to Lévi-Strauss's structuralism by Leach (1964) will be used to explore the existence or otherwise of consensus-oriented Ikwo proverbs and consensus worldviews.

For interviews with non-literates, more information about the respondents will be given, and evidence of what they said in Ikwo will be provided.

4.1. Method of analysis

The combined method was also used in the analysis. First, the analysis of the contribution pattern of the proverbs among the groups that contributed them, and the reasons for the observed pattern was done. This was followed by the analysis of individual proverbs for their individual meanings as explained by respondents. To achieve this, respondents whose proverbs were chosen for analysis were contacted to arrange for interviews during which their perspectives on the proverbs they quoted was carefully recorded. This arrangement ensured that the respondents whose proverbs were analysed and included in this study had the opportunity of a one-on-one discussion with the researcher. Some non-literate respondents had two such opportunities.

To provide more information about the respondents while safeguarding their right to anonymity in quoting my interviews with them, only their pseudonyms, age, sex and literacy status will be indicated. This measure helps to maintain their right to anonymity while at the same time helping the reader to relate the overall social environment of the respondent to the proverbs he/she uses. For example, (Nwali, 68, m, e) means that the respondent by name Nwali is 68 years old, male, and is educated (where educated means ability to read and write), while (Nweke, 79, f, u) means that Nweke is 79 years old, female and is uneducated (where uneducated means inability to read and write). These details are derived from their personal

details which they supplied to me in the research questionnaire form (see Appendix 7: Participant Data Collection Survey).

As a measure to confirm or validate the interpretations and possible uses of proverbs given by a respondent, alternative interpretations and uses were sought from the traditional ruler of the respondent's community as well as from other respondents who are opinion leaders in their communities. This is because in the Ikwo society, the traditional rulers together with their elders-in-council form the highest decision-making body in each community. They are regarded as the custodians of the culture and tradition of their community. They are thus, the reference point in all matters relating to their culture and tradition (Eze, 2011). In this way, the opinion of a broad spectrum of the respondents contributed in arriving at what can be described as the authentic meaning(s) and uses(s) of every proverb analysed in this study.

Overall, after receiving responses from a total of 250 participants via the research questionnaire forms (Appendix 7), a total of 130 valid proverbs were chosen for analysis. These are proverbs that met the criteria to be regarded as such by paremiologists (Finnegan, 1994; Mieder, 2004). Such proverbs among others share the four features of being short but complete sentences; contain traditional wisdom; are usually metaphorical, fixed and memorable; and finally, are handed down from generation to generation. These features distinguish proverbs from other folk genres such as folktales, riddles, idioms, wellerisms¹ etc.

First, the proverbs were sorted into six categories based on the Firth (1926b) system of proverb classification by function and presented as shown below.

S/N	Category	Total number of proverbs	Percentage of grand total
1.	Life and living (LL)	32	24.61
2.	Death and the great beyond (DB)	14	10.77
3.	Gender relations (GR)	17	13.08
4.	The aged in society (AS)	12	9.23
5.	Children and youths (CY)	23	17.70
6.	Man and nature (MN)	32	24.61
	Grand Total	130	100

Table 7. Distribution of proverbs according to category.

According to Firth, though it is possible to classify proverbs according to their form, content, subject matter or occasion of use, the system that relates the proverb most closely to the daily experiences of the people is classification by function. The system classifies proverbs

according to the aspect of life under which they fall. Its high point is that it considers “the intimate correlation of the proverb with the life and thought of the people...the reality of the connection with native culture.” (ibid, p. 268). Moreover, the system also preserves the “organic relationship between the different groups and considers them as but integral parts of the unity of native life.” (ibid, p. 269). The system, which allows the grouping of proverbs into headings and subheadings, also allows for further arrangement of proverbs “according to their specific function, i.e. the purpose which they serve in that sphere of life.” (ibid). It was the system used by Firth to analyse the economic proverbs of the Maori of New Zealand that has enjoyed international scholarly acclaim till date.

Second, a detailed analysis of the questionnaire data was done to show the distribution pattern of the proverbs collected among the groups of contributors – the youths, the elderly, male or female, rural or urban dwellers, literate or non-literate groups was done.

Third, an analysis of the interview data was made category by category from a semiotic perspective and in the context of relevant theories of culture to assess the cultural worldview (Duru, 1983; Basgoz, 1993; Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994; Mmadike, 2014) of the Ikwo society because the proverb of a people is a good indication of their “code of morals...their practical philosophy of life and their principles of action” (Firth, 1926b, p. 245). “If you want to know a people, know their proverb” (Dabaghi *et al*, 2010, p. 811).

Finally, findings from the questionnaire analysis was used to corroborate findings from the interview analysis, and to arrive at the key findings of this study concerning the worldview of the Ikwo culture. The identified worldview(s) will be discussed in chapter five. However, only representative samples of proverbs collected from each category will be analysed for reasons of space and time.

4.2. Other methods

Many scholars have proposed many different but related approaches for the analysis of proverb meaning. For example, Nwoga (1975, cited in Penfield and Duru, 1988) and Seitel (1976) proposed frameworks for the sociolinguistic analysis of proverb meaning. In his article entitled “Appraisal of Igbo proverbs and idioms,” Nwoga proposed a model for the analysis of proverbs at three levels. At the first level (the literal meaning level) the proverb is analysed as a text which displays concrete imagery using symbols of traditional, ancestral or modern life. At the second level, the generalized moral and cultural principles (philosophical meaning) which generalizes the moral truth associated with the proverb is analysed. Finally, at the third level, the specific interactional context (contextual meaning) which uses the proverb either to reinforce ideas, support a statement or evaluate and correct the behaviour of others is analysed.

Seitel’s heuristic (social context) model aims at explaining the analogic social relationships which form the basis for the comprehension of the proverb. In his view, the correct interpretation of proverb meaning entails the process of metaphorical reasoning in which the text of a proverb is applied to the social interactional context through a process of correlation. Thus, through analogy, the literal meaning of a proverb is connected to its contextual meaning to arrive at the lesson in the proverb. But while Nwoga’s model recognizes the presence of underlying philosophy in proverbs and makes provision for understanding such philosophy or

philosophies, the Seitel model fails to provide for the adequate exploration of the philosophical meaning inherent in proverbs.

The Permyakov (1979) model for proverb analysis, according to Grzybek (1994) was developed over a period of ten years, and was published in 1979 under the title: *Grammar of Proverb Wisdom*. Taking his theoretical standpoint from the basic assumption that “a proverb is used as a sign in a particular (extra-linguistic) interaction situation to refer to a particular (extra-linguistic) reference situation, of and for which it is a sign” (ibid, 1994, p. 53), Permyakov proposes that to uncover both the denotative (surface/linguistic) and connotative (deep/cultural) meanings locked in proverbs, their analysis must be approached from four levels/planes. These planes include the linguistic (expression) plane, the realia (content) plane, the logico-semiotic (content) plane and the thematic (content) plane.

The linguistic (expression) plane is the level where the (denotative/surface) “specific syntactic structure of proverbs such as rhyme, rhythm, metrics, stylistics etc.” (ibid, p.56) can be found. The *realia* (content) plane is where the (denotative/surface) specific details of the cultural reality (image) that informs the proverb can be found. The logico-semiotic (content) plane is where the (connotative/deep) cultural situation (message) depicted by the proverb can be found. Finally, the thematic (content) plane is where the (connotative/deep) cultural theme depicted in the proverb can be found.

The three approaches above share much in common, and while there is much to take away from both Seitel’s and Permyakov’s models, the Nwoga model which sees proverbs as concrete images carrying the cultural and moral philosophies of a culture, and capable of shaping the worldview of members of a society is more in alignment with the Ikwo culture under study. This is because of the close cultural affinity which exists between the Igbo culture (the subject of Nwoga’s study) and the Ikwo culture. The philosophy that underlie Igbo proverbs as highlighted by Nwoga (1975) and described by Nwonwu (2014) will be used as the starting point in the analysis of Ikwo proverbs as a reflection of their cultural worldview (Messenger, 1960; Basgoz, 1993; Mieder and Dundes, 1994; Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994; Oha, 1998; Mieder, 2004; Mmadike, 2014). What the above studies also share is that they all focus on identifying the meaning of proverbs without any attempt to analyse them holistically for the worldviews which they express. Here lies the difference between such studies and this one which aims to go a step further by taking a holistic view of all the Ikwo proverbs analysed to identify the Ikwo worldview as conveyed in them.

However, analysing a people’s worldview through their proverb is fraught with its own challenges. According to Winick (2001) a typical approach would be to select a topic or concept about which to inquire, for example, the people’s orientation towards time, life and death, etc. and gather data about the culture’s attitude towards the chosen topic or concept from a collection of proverbs. The proverbs are then sorted according to the number that either “stigmatize, valorize [sic] or normalize the concept in question” (ibid, p. 360). The result can then be deduced by saying that since X number of proverbs from the chosen culture express a positive attitude towards the concept, and Y number of proverbs express a negative attitude, and since X is larger than Y, the chosen culture has a positive attitude towards the concept.

The first challenge of this type of research as identified by Winick is that most scholars who have done it in the past analysed proverbs as distinct numbers of decontextualized texts rather than as instances of proverb use in speech acts – emphasizing item over performance. Others

include the thinking by pioneer proverb scholars like Taylor, Whiting and Samper (cited in Winick, *ibid*, p. 362) that:

...our preconceived notions about national character always colour our selection and interpretation of proverbs, so that investigations of this sort always confirm our stereotypes"; proverbs reveal only "certain stereotypical values" of a people; and that they reflect "hegemonic" forces rather than the full spectrum of popular thought.

These challenges are compounded by the multiplicity of meanings that proverbs acquire under different contexts and situations of use as well as their purported contradictory stands against each other ((Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1973; Seitel, 1976).

Perhaps, it is in apparent frustration at these difficulties that Taylor argued that the results of centuries of efforts to identify national or racial traits in proverbs were "insignificant" (Winick, 2001, p. 323). Similarly, Whiting also argued that "we cannot hope to discover the characteristics of the Englishman, the Frenchman or the German by making a collection of proverbs" (*ibid*). These pioneer paremiologists had experienced similar frustrations with the definition of the proverb². But with time these frustrations were overcome through further research. Today, Noor's (2015) definition of the proverb is evidence of this: "A proverb is a short but complete statement carrying folk wisdom in a general and often figurative form to guide behaviour in a recurrent situation" (p. 25).

And while it remains true that proverbs acquire different meanings in different contexts and situations, Yankah (1994) has argued that what is often labelled contradictory proverbs by scholars are based on a superficial understanding of the dynamics of proverb use. He argues that the problem exists because people ignore the social context in which they are used. Once they are considered in context it will be seen that each opposing use/meaning of a proverb is a social strategy aimed at achieving a social aim in discourse.

If one deals with proverbs only as a concept of a cultural fact or truism, contradictions are easily found in any proverb repertoire, but once the proverbs are in contextual usage they function effectively as social strategies. In fact, the meaning of any proverb actually is [*sic*] only evident once it has been contextualized. Proverbs in normal discourse are not contradictory at all, and they usually make perfect sense both to the speaker and listener. After all, people don't speak in proverb pairs, unless they are "duelling" with proverbs as a verbal contest. Of the commonly known proverb pairs people will always choose that text which fits a situation best at a given time while ignoring its obvious counterpart now (*ibid*, p. 128).

He contends that the problem of contradictory proverbs seems to be resolved when we realize that when two proverbs take two extreme positions, the aim is to advise us to take the mild/moderate cause and avoid excesses always, noting that proverbs advise expediency, which obeys no consistent precepts. "In fact, it is difficult to talk of contradiction between proverbs, since proverbs have more than one meaning. This character of the proverb increases its value as a rhetorical tool" (*ibid*, p. 134). Contributing to the debate, Opata (1992, pp. 195, 197) wrote: "Rather than perceive the existence of contradictory proverbs as an obstacle to a meaningful interpretation of a people's cultural outlooks, one should accept it as simply signalling a non-monolithic way of construing the world by a people" because "different peoples in different societies (or even within the same community) do not give the same interpretive meaning to the same act."

Nevertheless, the study of proverbs has been undertaken by many scholars to identify dominant national traits and cultural attitudes” (ibid, p. 187). For example, Opata reports that earlier studies have been carried out to establish the worldviews of Japanese, Americans, Koreans, Africans and Indians on speech by analysing their proverbs on speech. These studies found that the Japanese, the Americans and the Koreans have a negative worldview of speech while the Africans and Indians have a positive view of speech. In his own study in which he analysed 102 Igbo proverbs to identify the Igbo attitude to speech, Opata found that “it is obvious that the overall Igbo attitude to speech is decidedly positive” because of “the importance placed on speech art and on the democratic nature of most indigenous Igbo societies” (ibid, p. 199).

The negative attitude to speech in Japan was attributed to the high population density of the country and the emphasis the Japanese placed on polite and respectful behaviour in established social relations. Compliance to social norms was valued more than speech (complaints/objections) etc. The reason for the negative attitude to speech in America was their perception that words undermine deeds, and as such should be minimized in social interaction. Though the Igbo placed a lot of emphasis on action and achievement as well as on respectful behaviour especially in dealing with the elders, their perception of speech remained positive because of the importance they placed on speech as an art, and the democratic nature of most traditional Igbo societies which encouraged freedom of expression.

One major contribution of this study to the field of proverb study is that it addresses the fundamental issues of proverb analysis raised as early as the beginning of the twentieth century by Firth (1926a), explained and applied by Arewa and Dundes (1964) and analysed by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1973) and Seitel (1976).² First it treats the proverb as performance by collecting the proverbs in current use from participants who use them in daily interaction (Winick, 2001). Second, the proverbs are sorted out according to categories and analysed as signs that need to be interpreted using semiotics as an analytical tool to arrive at their deep cultural meanings (Bakhtin, 1981; Zhao, 2012). Third, being a member of the culture, I am investigating, I bring to the analysis my knowledge of the language and culture as recommended by Seitel and Dabaghi *et al.* In the process of the analysis, I critically interrogate cultural stereotypes and hegemonic ideologies conveyed in proverbs.

4.3. Questionnaire data

The data used for this study was collected through questionnaire and interviews to ensure that data collected were representative of all social groups (Moore, 2000) of the Ikwo society. In the questionnaire, the respondents were requested to supply one proverb in current use, which they were likely to use in daily conversation. Also, they were asked, among other questions, to provide their own interpretation of the proverb, the context(s) in which they were likely to use it as well as the lesson the proverb aimed to teach or the purpose it aimed to serve when used. As indicated in this chapter, after receiving responses from a total of 250 participants, a total of 130 valid proverbs were chosen for analysis. The proverbs were contributed according to age, sex, background and literacy as shown in the tables that follow³.

S/N	Age	LL	DB	GR	AS	CY	MN	Total
1	Elders	29	11	12	11	21	28	112 (86.15%)

2	Youths	03	03	05	01	02	04	18 (13.85)
	Total	32	14	17	12	23	32	130 (100%)

Table 8. Contribution of proverbs according to age groups

The above figures show that of the 130 proverbs collected for this study, the elders reported more proverbs (112 proverbs representing 86.15%) than the youths who reported only 18 proverbs representing only 13.85%. For convenience sake, the contributors were divided into two broad age groups: youths and elders. The young and the middle aged (16-40 and 41-70) were classified as youths while those aged 71 and above were classified as elders.

It is also possible to see the contribution of proverbs by each group according to proverb category. Accordingly, the elders reported 29 (90.62%) of the 32 proverbs in the category of Life and Living (LL) while the youth reported only 3 (9.37%) of the 32 proverbs. In the Death and Great Beyond (DB) category, the elders reported 11 (78.57%) out of 14 proverbs as against 3 (21.43%) reported by the youth. In the Gender Relations (GR) category, the elders reported 12 (70.59%) of the 17 proverbs while the youth reported 5 (29.41%). In the category of The Aged in Society (AS) the elders reported 11 (91.66%) of 12 proverbs while the youth reported only 1 (8.34%). In the Children and Youth (CY) category the elders also reported more proverbs than the youths. The elders reported 21 (91.30%) while the youth reported 2 (8.70%) of the 23 proverbs in the category. Finally, in the Man and Nature (MN) category, the pattern remained the same as the elders reported 28 (87.5%) of the 32 proverbs in the category while the youth reported only 4 (12.5 %).

S/N	Sex	LL	DB	GR	AS	CY	MN	Total
1	Male	23	10	10	07	17	24	91 (70%)
2	Female	09	04	07	05	06	08	39 (30%)
	Total	32	14	17	12	23	32	130 (100%)

Table 9. Contribution of proverbs according to sex

The contribution of proverbs according to sex showed that the male respondents reported more proverbs (70% of the total) than their female counterparts (30% of the total) across all proverb categories, including the category of gender relations (GR) where the men reported 10 (58.82%) of the 17 proverbs while the women reported 7 (41.2%). It must be noted here, though that the gap between the women and the men is not as wide as that between the youth and the elders as indicated above, owing, perhaps to the increasing consciousness of women on issues that concern them.

S/N	B/ground	LL	DB	GR	AS	CY	MN	Total
1	Rural	25	11	12	08	13	21	90 (69.23%)
2	Urban	07	03	05	04	10	11	40 (30.77%)
	Total	32	14	17	12	23	32	130 (100%)

Table 10. Contribution of proverbs according to background

The rural dwellers reported more proverbs 69.23% than the urban dwellers 30.77% across all categories. On category by category basis, the rural dwellers also reported more proverbs than their urban counterparts, by wide margins except in the children and youth category where the margin was not as wide (13 proverbs to 10), meaning 56.52% to 43.48%. In other words, in that category the rural dwellers reported 8.09% more proverbs than the urban dwellers.

S/N	Literacy	LL	DB	GR	AS	CY	MN	Total
1	Non-literate	26	09	10	08	14	19	86 (66.15%)
2	Literate	06	05	07	04	09	13	44 (33.85%)
	Total	32	14	17	12	23	32	130 (100%)

Table 11. Contribution of proverbs according to literacy.

The non-literate group also reported more proverbs than the literate group. Of the 130 proverbs, the group reported 86 (66.15%) while the literate group reported 44 (33.85%). The trend is the same across all six proverb categories.

A summary of the proverb contribution pattern shown in the four tables above shows that overall, the elders reported more proverbs than the youth; the males reported more proverbs than the females; the rural dwellers reported more proverbs than the urban dwellers while the non-literates reported more proverbs than the literates. What factors are responsible for these trends? The paragraphs that follow will attempt an explanation.

Proverbs are predominantly used by the elders because they are traditionally regarded as the custodians of proverbial knowledge, which comes from age and usage. They are, therefore in a vantage position to have more proverbs in their stock than the youths. The association of elders with proverbs is as old as research in the area. In fact, the authorship of most proverbs is attributed to the elders whose “voice” proverbs are said to be in the Yoruba society, as the authors of traditional wisdom (Arewa and Dundes, 1964, p. 70). The case is the same in the Igbo society because of the areas of cultural overlap among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria⁴. As a result, most proverbs are prefixed with the words “Our elders say....” But there

is an added layer of restriction imposed on the youths about the use of proverbs in Yoruba land where the elders seem to have unrestricted access and the right to use proverbs for the training of children, while younger persons may only use proverbs in the presence of elders with due apologies. "Younger persons are not wholly excluded, but Yoruba etiquette dictates that a younger person's use of a proverb in the presence of an older person must be marked by a prefatory apology" (ibid, p. 79).

Corroborating the above view, Ojoade (1983) wrote:

Generally, among the Yoruba as among other Africans, a youth does not quote proverbs except with permission from an elder. The same is true of women. So, it is mainly elders who use proverbs...though a youth or a woman can do so once permission has been granted (p. 202).

And Agbaje (2002, p. 237) noted that "Yoruba elders constitute the repository of the traditional intelligence, logic and verbal or oral wit of the people." In this society, the elders use proverbs extensively to resolve conflicts and reconcile warring parties. Among the Tiv people of Benue State, north central Nigeria, "only ancient and respected elders are well versed in the usage of numerous proverbs" (Bergsma, 1970, p. 153) and they use it to control social behaviour.

The above is like the situation in the Igbo society where the elders, especially grandparents who act as caregivers have the exclusive rights to use corrective proverbs to socialize children on the values and philosophy of the Igbo life during their training and upbringing (Penfield and Duru, 1988). On the other hand, in the same Igbo society, "children are not permitted to address proverbs to adults" (ibid, p. 120) and are sanctioned from making any response or comment when spoken to in proverbs" (p. 125)

And from neighbouring Ghana, Christensen (1958), Yankah, (1989; 2012), and Obeng (1996) have conducted researches which tend to confirm the same pattern of proverb knowledge and use as we see in Nigeria. For example, Christensen reported that among the Fante people of Ghana, proverb contests were common among the elders, who competed to see who could quote more proverbs, or recount and explain them. Among these people, proverbs were quoted extensively in judicial proceedings presided over by elders to resolve conflicts. Here they were quoted as laws that govern interpersonal relationships. They were also used for child rearing to indoctrinate in children the acceptable standards of social behaviour, among other functions.

Yankah's study found that "among the Akan of Ghana, the chief, his spokesman, elders and allied traditional artists constituted the repository of traditional intelligence, logic and verbal wit" (p. 334-336) where skills in public speaking and the artistic use of proverbs were qualities expected of them. In his own words,

But the artful control of words is not a commonplace practice, it is the preserve of individuals in society who have been constantly exposed to the aesthetics of traditional communication. According to the Baganda of Uganda, words are like drum: only the well versed can play it; only the knowledgeable can dance to it.... Akan youths on the other hand, may only use proverbs in the presence of adults after prefacing it with the appropriate apologetic formula.

Obeng's study showed that proverbs as "cultural truisms ascribed to the elders or ancestors" (p. 523) were used by them to soften the face threatening effects of their role as advisors to

younger persons, including their own children. This is because their role as advisors was often a face threatening act which had to be mitigated “lest it be misconstrued as a verbal assault or an imposition on the advisee” (ibid).

The situation is not any different in Cameroon from where Siran (1993) who did an extensive research on proverb use among the Vute people found that only the Mossi elders reserved the right to use the proverb to enforce the social norms of society on its members. And among the Mexicanos of New Mexico, great respect was accorded to individuals whose conversation reflected the wisdom of the elders: “the speaker who controls the folkloric genres that constitute...the talk of the elders of bygone days is highly regarded” (Briggs, 1985, pp. 794-795).

From the foregoing, it could be seen that knowledge of and use of proverbs serve as a source of exercising traditional power, knowledge and authority used mostly by the elders as a means of social control and for the upbringing of children. Proverb performance is also a way of gaining or enhancing social prestige and acceptance in society. As such, the more proverbs one knows and uses, the more prestige and acceptability one enjoys. This societal expectation can be explained by the Eckert and McConnel-Ginnet (1992, 1999, cited in Noor, 2015) community practice theory. So, a combination of these and other factors, naturally encourage the elders to actively use proverbs on day to day basis, while the existence of disincentives drives the youth away from proverb knowledge and use. This might explain their lack of interest in the acquisition and use of proverbs as well as the language in which it is used.

In the case of the Ikwo language under study, education and urbanization has produced a corps of young Ikwo people who have acquired proficiency in the English language at the expense of the Ikwo language, which they are hardly able to speak. They have also lost touch with the rural folk and their proverbs. However, instead of regretting this loss, the youth rather prefer to flaunt their newly acquired knowledge of English as an instrument of countering the hegemonic control of proverb knowledge and the power possessed by the elderly rural folk.

The males also account for more proverbs in comparison with their female counterparts for similar reasons that the females suffer discriminatory proverb practices from their male counterparts in many African societies. For example, Hussein (2005) carried out an extensive research on the proverbs of many African societies and their perception of women. The research analysed proverbs from the Oromo people of Ethiopia, the Igbo and Yoruba people of Nigeria, the Tsonga-Shangana people of Ghana and the Lugbara people of Uganda, the Gikuyu of Kenya etc. It found that negative gender stereotypes targeted against women abound in the proverbs from these societies. She noted that in these societies, proverbs were used as an instrument for shaping a negative gender ideology for women. This ideology portrayed women mostly in negative terms; only occasionally recognizing them as symbols of warmth and nourishing goodness. On the other hand, men were portrayed in alluring terms as superior and deserving of the allegiance and subservience of women, and who had the prerogative of exercising their power over women, the subordinated and marginalized. Thus, proverbs in these societies, she noted, were used by men as instruments of repression against women.

Specifically, from the Igbo culture, Oha's (1998) study of proverb use among the Igbo society of Nigeria showed similar attempts by men who dominated the social discourse space in the society to perpetrate their hegemonic domination of the womenfolk. “Proverbs, as forms of

figurative communication with didactic functions in studied conversations were found to possess evidences of male attempt at maintaining control over discourse in society” (ibid, p. 87). She noted that the situation becomes more dangerous when stereotypes against women are encoded in proverbs, a form of communication highly respected in the Igbo culture, as this will amount to an endorsement of such stereotypes that signify prejudice and hostility against women. This above situation is further compounded by the fact that women are excluded from contexts where proverbs are used in rhetoric, as in village or clan meeting. Only men attended such meetings where proverbs were used extensively as highlighted in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* (Achebe, 1958, 1964). Under such circumstances, women were denied the opportunity to learn or use proverbs.

Also, Mmadike (2014) after a critical analysis of 22 Igbo sexist proverbs concluded that the proverbs were weaved by men to sustain the notion of male domination over females in the society. This they did using discriminatory language (proverb) which was detrimental to members of the opposite sex, and by using those in favour of men to create bias in favour of the male sex.

From the Yoruba culture, we read from Ojoade (1983) that women were classed together with children as among the group of people who were not allowed to use proverbs except with the permission of the elders, usually males. Balogun (2010) argued that the many Yoruba proverbs that demean womanhood were evidence of the oppression of women by men in proverb discourse, an area regarded as the exclusive preserve of men. Moreover, she argued that: “Proverbs are human sayings, as such some of them are misleading. They are dogmatic formulas, often authored by men (males), to foster their hegemonic masculinity” (p. 31). She advocates a reconstruction of the oppressive proverbs to deconstruct their traditional patriarchal representations in view of their many negative socio-psychological effects on women, especially in their relations to the opposite sex and their attitude towards proverb and proverb use. Women feel humiliated by such proverbs, which may also turn their interest away from proverb use as the data under consideration show.

Elsewhere in the Urhobo culture of Delta State, south-south Nigeria, Ifesieh and Darah’s (2013) study of the use of sex proverbs by Urhobo showed that they are often employed as powerful instruments to dominate and instil fear in the female as an ideological weapon in the struggle for power and domination between men and women, further entrenching patriarchal discourses in the society. Similar studies by Dickson and Mbosowo (2014) also show that many African cultures contain many negative stereotypes and complexes against women, and propagated through proverbs. The story is the same from Morocco (Webster, 1982), where many proverbs reflect not just “the natural inferiority of women to men, but that they become progressively more so with time. That in old age, the males reach their ultimate virtue, while the females reach their ultimate folly” (p. 180). Similar studies from Asia point to similar trends.⁵

The fact that rural dwellers contributed more proverbs than their urban counterpart may be due to many reasons. Since proverbs are essentially an oral art weaved in the rural areas by the folk and used more in conversation in the local community, it is more likely that the rural dwellers will be more at home with the genre. However, two studies that analysed the actual pattern of proverb contribution by participants according to their different groups will help throw more light on the reasons for the observed trend. For example, Oha (1998) collected and analysed 32 sexist Igbo proverbs used in context to assess the way in which women were represented in the Igbo culture. By using the contextual approach by which proverb collection

was restricted to the very situations in which they were used and by whom, 16 of the proverbs were collected from the rural area (rural context discourse) and 16 were collected from the urban area (urban context discourse). For the same reason, the proverbs were also grouped according to the sex of their contributors.

Her quantitative analysis showed that the males contributed more proverbs to the study (62.07%) than the females (6.90%). Similarly, the rural dwellers contributed more proverbs (68.97%) than the urban dwellers (31.03%). Children were not included in the studies, perhaps for the earlier identified reasons that children were restricted from the use of proverbs in the presence of adults in the Igbo culture (Penfield and Duru, 1988). Her explanation for the male/female and urban/rural variation in proverb contribution border on the fact that the proverb is regarded as a male art and that in the contexts where proverbs are used, e.g. in village and kinsmen meetings, women are hardly allowed to be present except where the issues at stake affect them directly. In other words, women are usually excluded from the discourse situations in which proverbs are extensively used.

On the reason for the rural/urban gap, many scholars attribute it to the fact that in the urban areas, the “folk” (Penfield and Duru, 1988, p.125) pattern of life under which proverbs are produced and consumed have been altered by urbanization. This is the case in Nigeria where urbanization has created a class of Ikwo urban dwellers who have lost touch with the rural habitat and ways of life that gave meaning to proverbs such as: *Eghu oha akwaru ekwo nri be egu egbuje* (The goat fed by the group often dies of hunger). This is because this proverb derives its meaning from the rural imagery invoked by the communally-owned goat which members of the community take turns to supply edible leaves and grasses to keep alive and healthy. Urban dwellers who have no direct experiences of the scenario and images used in the proverb will find it difficult to connect with the proverb, let alone understand its surface or deep meaning. Such difficulties, no doubt, contribute to keep them off proverb use compared to their rural counterparts for whom the scenario and images used in the proverb are a daily experience.

Linguistic variables and the passage of time may also affect not only the pattern of proverb use by the members of a society, but also their general attitude to the proverb. For example, Noor (2015) analysed the pattern of proverb use among the Pashtuns of Pakistan and found that male participants in the research reported more proverbs (54%) than the female participants (29%); the educated reported less proverbs (29%) than the uneducated (40%), while the youth reported less proverbs (31%) than the elders (69%). Rural dwellers reported more proverbs (73%) than urban dwellers (10%). He offers many reasons based on the findings of sociological research for the trend. According to him, one possible explanation is the fact that sociologists believe that language use is intrinsically correlated with age, gender, sex, class among other variables; and that linguistic variables change from one age group to another.

Secondly, as patterns of language use change over generations, some linguistic features get left behind with the passage of time. Most often the greatest casualties of such changes are formulaic utterances – proverbs and wise sayings. This phenomenon may explain the case of Europe during the Age of Enlightenment when proverbs fell into disrepute (Barrick, 1985).

Though linguistic variables and the passage of time have affected the popularity of the proverb in the Ikwo culture, there still exists a love for the genre among most of the people. Even the

youth and women who seem to be turned off proverb use for the reasons mentioned above, admire any expert knowledge and use of the genre by the elders and others gifted in their use, and would welcome any opportunity to acquire the art, hence the need to teach the genre in schools and colleges in the area. For example, the sample completed questionnaire in appendix 7 was sent in by a young female proverb enthusiast in the age range of 21-30, a literate school teacher who lives in the rural area. The same enthusiasm is shared by others in her age bracket who live in the cities, and who contributed proverbs to this research. Be that as it may, this study did not set out to gauge the popularity or acceptability of the proverb among the various groups that make up the Ikwo society. But such a study promises to be a rewarding topic for future research in the area.

The other reason, also based on sociological research is that people use speech appropriate to their age group. As such people use one linguistic feature in their speech while young and adopt another as they get older. It, therefore, stands to reason that young people who use proverbs less frequently today may start to use more proverbs more frequently when they grow older. For the same reason, older people tend to become more conservative with language use in conformity to social norms of appropriate speech, while younger speakers perceive proverb use as more appropriate with the elderly and less with the youth. On the reason for less use of proverbs by women, Noor (2015) explains that women are disadvantaged in acquiring proverbs because of their limited exposure beyond the home compared to men who are more mobile and interact with a variety of people from different backgrounds, and have more opportunities to learn new proverbs.

In summary, the above analysis shows that the elders reported more proverbs than the youth; the males reported more proverbs than the females; the rural dwellers reported more proverbs than the urban dwellers while the non-literates reported more proverbs than the literates. This trend accounts for the dominant voice of the elderly in the Ikwo proverb repertoire, giving it its predominantly traditional texture, and confirming the notion that proverbs reflected the views of the predominantly non-literate and rural dwelling male elders at the expense of the young, literate, urban dwelling, other groups like women and youth. This finding is in line with the findings of other scholars on proverb reporting by different social groups (Oha, 1998; Hussein, 2004, 2005, 2009; Noor, 2015). It is significant because it suggests the use of Ikwo proverbs in their present form by male elders as an instrument for the exercise of their power over women and youth, hence the need for critical reflection of proverb knowledge and potentially a certain focus on consensus-oriented proverbs in contemporary teaching programmes.

4.4. Proverbs of life and living

The analysis of proverbs in this section will focus on the Ikwo society's worldview on the relationship between the group and the individual in a predominantly rural society with an extended family system and in which communal living is the dominant lifestyle. Moemeka, (1998) has identified communalism as the lifestyle option more in tune with many traditional African societies. According to him, communalism is a socio-economic order in which the supremacy of the community is culturally, socially and economically entrenched, and where community welfare undergirds actions. In such a community, nothing is considered good unless it has relevance for the community, no matter how important it is to the individual. In the same token, no misfortune, no matter how personal, is left for the individual to bear alone. It is against the above background that this section proposes to analyse the proverbs that deal with these relationships in greater detail.

The first proverb in this section is unequivocal in asserting the superiority of the group over the individual when it states that:

1. *A du igwe a kputa ugbo.*
One be many one pull boat
When people are many they can pull the boat.

This proverb quoted by an elderly male, 72, rural dweller, self-employed, non-literate who is incidentally a boat builder and lives in the riverine area of Ikwo means that only the collective effort of a group of people can pull a boat stuck in the mud or the sand of the beach to the shores for repairs; or back into the waters after repairs. It also applies to a newly carved boat as only such group effort can move it from dry land where it was carved into the sea for use as a means of transport. This is a task which no man, no matter how strong can claim to be able to accomplish alone. It is a metaphor for the limitations of individual effort compared to that of the group.

He explained that the proverb has its origin from the time when the natural circumstances of the people were such that the numerous rivers that criss-cross the Ikwo landscape had to be crossed using canoes and boats. Even today, some journeys still must be made by this means in the riverine communities. The canoes and boats needed for these journeys must be built by felling trees and carving them into canoes and boats in the forest. Afterwards, they must be moved to the river, and only the collective efforts of a group of able-bodied men and women can pull the heavy object from the site of manufacture to the site of use.

According to him the proverb can be used by adults and the elderly to advise other adults and young persons on the need to tap into the advantage offered by the readily available assistance of friends, relatives and community to solve day to day problems. For example, a young farmer who has cleared a large piece of land for cultivating yams to feed his family has been watched by an older member of the community working on his farm alone for several days without achieving much. One day he stops by and advises him to engage more hands and cites this proverb to support his advice. This explanation was supported by Nweke, a middle-aged fisherman who added that the proverb could also be used to mobilize a group of people for collective action with the aim of achieving collectively what an individual cannot achieve.

By citing this proverb, he aims to give authenticity and conviction to his advice because proverbs are usually prefaced with the phrase "Our Elders or Our Ancestors say that" ... (Arewa and Dundes, 1964) thus making the speaker an instrument through whom the wisdom of old is passed to the younger generation. The significance of the proverb would be that it could lead to a change in behaviour by the listener, and offer a solution to a problem (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994) which is in line with one of the numerous functions of the proverb.

The communalist approach to problem solving and the fact that an individual is easily overwhelmed by a problem is also mirrored by another Ikwo proverb quoted by a 36-year old self-employed, non-literate rural dweller:

2. *Agwo onye lanu phuru ghoru eke.*
Snake person one sees becomes python
A snake seen by one person turns into a python.

In this proverb, the snake is symbolic of a problem confronting an individual. Such problems assume gargantuan dimensions when confronted alone, even though they might not be as big. Snakes are perceived as dangerous and a threat to man's existence in the Ikwo society. The degree of threat posed by the snake to man is seen in proportion to the size of the snake. And of all the snakes in the Ikwo physical ecology, the Python is the biggest and the most dreaded. But while an individual can deal with the threat posed by smaller snakes like the green snake for example, no one individual can handle a python when confronted by it. The only option would be for such an individual to flee and recruit others to assist in killing the snake. So, an individual who is confronted by a problem is encouraged to consult others because faced alone, the problem appears gigantic and insurmountable, but faced as a group the problem will look small and easily surmounted. This interpretation of the proverb was echoed by Nwuguru, a 50-year old hunter who is known for his hunting prowess, especially for his skill in killing snakes.

The young man who quoted this proverb was obviously going through difficulties in starting life as a farmer independent of his parents. In his own case, he lost his father at a very young age, which further compounds his problems. As a young man who finds himself faced with a problem he cannot handle alone, he approaches an elderly more experienced or wealthier person for help, prefacing his request for assistance with the above proverb to avail himself of the collective strength afforded by the social solidarity network available to him to avoid being intimidated by problems

The significance of the proverb is that the young man relies on the words of the elders to obtain assistance from others by using a proverb which supports seeking such assistance. By depersonalizing his request, the proverb takes from him the burden of being weak or incapable of taking care of his personal problems. He thus hides under the canopy of the proverb to justify his action. The addressee in the same manner comes under the obligation of the elders or ancestors to provide the assistance sought because not to do so would be a betrayal of the social solidarity support system that has been in place since time immemorial.

On the other hand, an individual who tries to go through life in open confrontation with the rest of the community could be reminded that:

3. *Oha bu enyi; onye lanu bu ndada*

Group is elephant; person one is ant

The group is an elephant; the individual is an ant.

This proverb by an 80-year old self-employed, non-literate rural dweller and a prominent community leader is a metaphor for the insignificance of the individual compared to the group. The individual here is likened to an ant while the group is likened to an elephant. The contrast is self-explanatory because if the ant is engaged in a battle with the elephant, the outcome will be a predictable defeat of the ant by the elephant, in view of the obvious size and strength differences between the two animals. The proverb can be cited to an individual who engages his community in dispute over a land acquired for building a town hall. If the individual decides to take the community to court, an elder could go to him to advise him to desist from such a plan or withdraw the case, reminding him through the above proverb that he does not stand a chance of winning a dispute against a group because a group is much more powerful than he is. This interpretation was corroborated by Ogbule, a 60-year old member of the community who recounted the ordeal he went through when he engaged the community in a litigation

over the boundary between his land and his neighbour's, which he felt the community had drawn unfairly.

If the above proverb could not achieve the intended effect of persuading an individual to reconsider his intended action of engaging the community in a dispute, another proverb could be quoted to him to drive home the point of the odds against him:

4. *Onye lanu shia ru oha ephe erige ya; oha shia ru onye lanu epho awahu iya.*

Person one cooks for group they finish it; group cooks for person one stomach burst him.

If the individual cooks for the group they will finish it; if the group cooks for an individual his stomach will burst.

A middle-aged 50-year old self-employed, non-literate rural dweller, who had his farm land confiscated for failing to pay his share of a community levy quoted this proverb to stress the futility of going against the wishes of one's community because no individual can contend with the anger of a group. This proverb uses very vivid images to make the point that in the event of a contest with the group, the individual stands no chance of winning as he is sure to be overwhelmed by the sheer force of the group, no matter the individual's position or status in society. The power of strong collectives is highlighted in *Arrow of God* (Achebe, 1964) when the people of Umuaro decide to go to war with the people of Okperi over a piece of land that did not belong to them. Their chief priest opposes their claim and warns them against engaging in an unjust war. They defy his advice and go to war that resulted in many Umuaro casualties, after which the war was stopped by the white man who "sat in judgement over Umuaro and Okperi and gave the disputed land to Okperi" (ibid, p. 29). But the clan held it against their chief priest for not supporting them. Later when Ezeulu has another misunderstanding with Umuaro, Akuebue, a prominent citizen of Umuaro and Ezeulu's best friend reminds him that:

"...no man however great can win judgement against a clan. You may think you did in that land dispute but you are wrong. Umuaro will always say that you betrayed them before the white man. And they will say that you are betraying them again by sending your son to join in desecrating the land" (ibid, p. 131).

So, the interest of the clan (a group) is seen to be above the interest of the individual, and in case they clash, the individual is expected to abandon his in deference to the group's, irrespective of whether the group is right or wrong as we see in the above case. A middle-aged female fish seller in the village market told me the story of how their former chief was dethroned and his house set ablaze by the community because he refused to give proper accounts of monies generated from the sale of community land. After years of litigation in court, the chief lost the case, repaid the money and rebuilt his house all by himself. Obviously, the group had prepared for him a meal that burst his stomach.

Used in this sense the proverb aims to impress on the individual the need to suppress or abandon individual interests on the understanding that his individual interests can only be protected after the collective interest has been secured; that his personal interests cannot operate outside of the interest of the society in which he lives. Therefore, one who insists that his personal interest should supersede that of the group is confronted with the proverb below:

5. *Onye suru le eh'iya ka ehu oha, te o jeedu egu l'eke a alu ogu*

Person says that body his bigger (than) body group, let him go farm at place they fight war

Whoever says that his interest supersedes that of the group, let him go to farm on a disputed farmland.

The young self-employed, non-literate rural dweller who gave me this proverb shared with me the bitter way in which he learned the lesson of the proverb not long ago when he decided, out of pressing need to go single-handedly to harvest his yams from his farmland which had been taken over by a rival village. He was attacked by the rival group and nearly lost his life. Any piece of land in dispute between two communities is usually a theatre of war. As such any sensible person is expected to keep off such land until the fight for ownership is settled either through war or through negotiation. Though individuals have claims to such land, such claims cannot be exercised until the collective claim of the community to which he belongs is established. Only then is it safe to farm on the land. Before then, the individual must flow with the community interest and join in the war or negotiation to establish ownership. To do otherwise is to risk getting killed during the crossfire that is constantly going on under such circumstances. An advisor, a 72-year old village farmer and retired wrestler who warned him of the risk involved in that mission before he undertook it was on hand to corroborate his story.

The individual is constantly reminded of the limitations of individualism by many Ikwo proverbs, some of which are:

6. *Oshi lanu t'emejedu oswa*
Tree one makes not forest
One tree does not make a forest
7. *Onye lanu t'edejedu igidi*
Person one generates not stampede
One person does not generate a stampede
8. *Eka lanu t'agwojedu eji*
Hand one roles not pad
One hand cannot fold a head pad

What these proverbs have in common is the contrast they draw between the individual and the group by highlighting what the individual cannot achieve but which the group can. For example, in proverb 6, a single tree cannot populate any piece of land enough to form a forest where all kinds of plants and animals as well as humans depend on for their livelihood. In the same way, one person cannot generate a stampede, which is the result only of a group working in unison, just as one hand cannot fold a towel or any piece of cloth into a head pad used for carrying load. Either of these proverbs can be quoted by an advisor to any member of society seen to allow his personal interest to run counter to group interest and who seems to believe that he should be allowed to carry on independently of the group. The aim is to persuade him to see the limits of working alone and to embrace the benefits of working with the group.

Even a king is reminded that he cannot be king without the support of the community he is ruling by the proverb:

9. *Gidgidi bu ugwu eze*
Stampede is dignity king
Stampede is the dignity of the king

The non-literate self-employed elderly male who lives in the rural area and is a member of the traditional ruler's cabinet who quoted this proverb explained that it was impossible for a ruler

to remain in power after losing the support of his people. That support he equated with “gidigidi.” Gidigidi in the above proverb is an onomatopoeia for the sound generated by the feet of the community in a solidarity march in support of the king. Without such support, the reign of such a king will be seen to lack the dignity and respect, which come from the people. The proverb can be quoted to any one in leadership position who does not seem to carry the people along in his leadership style. It is a way of checking against leaders who lose touch with the people he is leading, and to make them to pursue policies that enjoy the support and approval of the people. This view was shared by other members of the cabinet who were present, and gave instances of rulers who were dethroned in the past for losing touch with the people.

The efficacy of group action is further highlighted by another Ikwo proverb:

10. A nyiko mamini onu y’ogbo uphu

One joins urine together it produces foam
If many urinate together it foams

The emphasis here is the result of the concentration of the energies of many people to achieve an objective, and how the energy of a group channelled to one goal can achieve more than the energies of individuals channelled in different directions. This proverb was quoted by a 24-year old man who is non-literate but a community youth leader emphasized to me how the cooperation of all the youths in the community was key to his success in delivering community projects that required the physical presence and efforts of all the youths of the community. The proverb can be quoted by an advisor to convince youths who are aggrieved about an issue of common interest to join forces together and present a common front in pursuit of the matter. This is in the belief that the combined forces of a group can achieve more than individual’s efforts in such cases. When a group embarks on an action together, people contribute their different talents, finances and other resources towards a common cause, with the result that success is more easily achieved than working as individuals. An instance of a neighbouring community where the failure of the youths to work together to erect electric poles denied them the chance of rural electricity was cited by another youth to corroborate the truth and importance of the proverb as a tool for mobilizing the group for positive action.

Another proverb with the same import as the one above is:

11. Eka wota eka wota onu eji

Hand bring hand bring mouth full
If one hand brings and another hand brings the mouth is full

Though the mouth is one organ it takes more than one hand to feed it. If we take the human body to represent the society in this proverb, the mouth represents the individual while the hands represent other individuals who contribute to feed the mouth. The proverb is a statement on the fact that it is difficult for an individual to meet his personal needs independent of the other members of the family or village or clan. Or at least that it would be difficult for the individual to rely on oneself alone to meet his personal needs, hence the need to avail oneself of the support provided by the family, friends and community. This proverb may be quoted to galvanize support for a member of society who is seen to need such support. For example, if Mr A is sick and in need of medical treatment the cost of which he cannot bear alone, Mr B can use this proverb to rally support from other members of Mr A’s family or community by appealing to them to contribute towards Mr A’s medical treatment. The attraction of this

method in raising the money for Mr A's treatment is that it spreads the burden among so many people that it is not heavy on any one person.

The significance of this proverb quoted to me by an elderly female, non-literate rural dweller, a widow and grandmother who relied on the support of her numerous children and grandchildren for her sustenance since the death of her husband, told me that without the collective efforts of her children and grandchildren she would have been dead long ago, is that it drives home the point of the benefits of family solidarity to the individual and the ease with which the burden of an individual can be carried by the group if shared among them. In short it is used to galvanize support for the needy in society.

Communalism is an ideal held in such high esteem that the group is prepared to sacrifice their lives for what they believe in, giving rise to the proverb that

12. Onwu gbaru eka egbu oha dua l'eje l'aji

Death join hand kill group is (like) to go to festival

The death that kills all is like a festival

A 76-year old, non-literate, self employed rural dweller and a celebrated fearless warrior whose father was known to have led the Ikwo clan to many inter-clan wars in the past interpreted this proverb quoted to me by a self-employed female respondent who lives in the village and is non-literate. He may have been attracted to the proverb by the festival imagery at the end of it. Though now in his eighties, his face brightened up when I approached him for his interpretation of the proverb as he recalled the enthusiasm with which his late father was said to have fearlessly faced the enemy encouraged by the fact that he was only one of many marching to war in defence of his clan. He explained that though the subject of the above proverb is death, which is a frightening experience for all mortals, its pain is not only eased but death becomes a pleasant ritual if it is undertaken in a group. In other words, the group participation in any ritual, including the death ritual relieves it of its pains and turns it into a pleasant experience. As such the desire to identify with the group is one that cannot be destroyed even by the threat of death. In fact, death in the group becomes a pleasant experience. Such feeling of strong sense of identification with and commitment to a group's cause may account for the zeal with which people embrace wars in defence of a shared cause even when they know that war brings death.

The proverb also means that if a misfortune befell a group, it was easier to bear knowing that one was not singled alone by such a misfortune. For example, if a flood destroyed the crops and livestock of most people in a community, it would be easier to bear the loss than if an individual was the victim of such a flood. This perspective to the proverb was given by another elderly farmer who was among those whose rice farms were destroyed by a flood that recently ravaged the farming community, and who drew consolation from the fact that his loss was even among the least, judging by the size of his rice farm.

The proverb can be quoted to invoke the courage to face challenges or bear misfortunes especially when they affect people as a group. It can also be quoted to justify a decision already taken to identify with a group cause, fully aware of the dangers involved in doing so.

From the proverbs quoted so far by my respondents, they all share a deep conviction that life would be difficult to live outside the group. I sought to find their reasons for this conviction in an interview:

Researcher: Why do you feel that you cannot achieve much without the help of your family and friends?

Respondent: As you see, all of us in this village work with our hands to earn a living. Either you till the ground and plant food to eat, or you go to the bush to kill animals to sell and buy food to eat, or you go to Ebonyi River to catch fish to sell and feed your family. You cannot do any of these things alone. You need the help of people to do any of these jobs. That is why our people say that: *Onye lanu be ele iphe le enya* (Person one is look thing in eye) (meaning that an individual is only a spectator in relation to a problem without being able to do anything about it).

(Uguru, 73, m, u)

Mr Uguru means that one person is a spectator when faced with a job he cannot accomplish alone. He looks at the job, shrugs his shoulders in helplessness and goes looking for help. The proverbs quoted in this category and the arguments put forward by this interviewee in support of their conviction can be understood against the context that they are predominantly rural dwellers, who depend on their ability to harness natural resources to make a living. They know from first-hand experience that to extract their livelihood from nature is a battle one cannot win alone, hence the need for mutual assistance from family and friends. Thus, context gives rise to lifestyle and lifestyle gives rise to proverbs because proverbs are contextual and unless there is a context, there is no proverb (Yankah, 1983)

However, this social solidarity philosophy appears to be contradicted by other proverbs which seem to endorse individualism. The first of such proverbs is:

13. *Eghu oha akwaru ekwo nri be egu egbuje.*

Goat group serves leaf food is hunger kills

The goat fed by the group often dies of hunger.

This proverb quoted and interpreted by a middle-aged self-employed non-literate male respondent, a goat farmer who lives in the rural area means that any asset collectively owned suffers neglect and abandonment. So, the meaning goes beyond the goat imagery to apply to any thing of communal interest which is usually often neglected because no one person assumes personal responsibility. But the target of the criticism of this proverb is not on collective action or collective ownership per se but on the dangers of uncoordinated activity of a group in caring for a collectively owned asset. For example, the goat owned by a group in the above proverb dies of hunger although the group can provide more food to feed the goat than the individual. The goat dies perhaps because of lack of coordination among those whose responsibility it is to feed the goat in turns. So, the emphasis here is on the lack of coordination among members of a group to achieve group targets.

The proverb may be quoted to a group of people who are likely to endanger collective interest by not working together. It is therefore a wakeup call to members of a group to embrace the virtues of working together in harmony and in turns. In such a situation, effective communication among group members is key to achieving collective goals.

The second proverb which seems to endorse individualism is

14. *Ehu onye ka ehu oha*

Body person pass body group

Personal interests supersede group interests

This proverb was quoted by a young self-employed, non-literate rural dweller, whose father was said to have been a renowned philanthropist, but who spent all his resources in helping the needy. When he became bankrupt, no one came to his aid, and he died leaving nothing for his children. As a result, this respondent was unable to receive education because his father left no savings for that purpose. He explained the proverb to mean that the individual should take care of his interests, not those of others. But while the above proverb does not seek to discredit communalism, it seeks to draw attention to the importance of taking care of one's personal interests at the same time. This is because as an individual, one is expected to appeal for the help of the group only in those matters that are beyond the individual capacity. Otherwise, the individual owes himself the duty of self-preservation and self-help. This proverb can be quoted to discourage the pursuit of group interest to the neglect of one's own personal interest. If a person fails to balance the demands of the collective against his individual demands, an elder in his family could call his attention to this imbalance. During advice, the elder could quote this proverb to help the person to steer a mid-course between the two ideals.

The two respondents above quoted proverbs which show that they share a conviction opposite to those of the majority in this category. I cornered one of them to find out why.

Researcher: Why do you think you can do things on your own instead of doing things together with others?

Respondent: Our people say that *Iphe m bu iphem, iphe oha bu iphe oha* (Thing mine is thing mine, thing group is thing group) (meaning that what belongs to me belongs to me, what belongs to the group belongs to the group). Why I say so is because if you depend on the group to feed you, you will die of hunger. That is why I plan my own thing without waiting for anyone, so that whether I receive help or not I will not die of hunger.

(Ede, 52, m, u)

The proverbs quoted by these minority respondents and the argument put forward by one of them in their defence can be understood if viewed in the context of their lived experience. In the first case, the goats that waited to be fed in turns by the group died of hunger. The child who expected the group to cater for his education ended up uneducated. Both experiences are enough to make one lose confidence in the group, and resort to self-help.

Though the view represented by these two proverbs appears to stand in contradistinction to the majority view, a careful analysis of these seemingly opposed views will help to shed more light on the nature of proverbs. From a communal point of view, the view that group interest should supersede individual interest is true. But from the point of view of individualism, the view that personal interest should supersede group interest is also true. So, the deciding factor is the context in which a proverb is used (Yanka, 2015). Though the two proverbs appear contradictory in absolute terms, they cease to be so when considered in context of use. The proverb is therefore, evidence of the contradictions in real life reflected by proverbs in which two opposing moral principles or values exist side by side in society.

The one ...had the avowed and ostensible support of the community, was inculcated during the education of the young, was praised by public opinion.... The other, contrary to the expressed morality of the social group, but professed, tolerated, and widely

acted upon because it was so deeply rooted in human nature, was the impulse of the individual to seek his own immediate advantage. (Firth, 1926a, p. 254).

Be that as it may, the above argument in the Ikwo society seems to have been won by the challenge put forward in proverb 5 above: "Whoever says that his interest supersedes that of the group, let him go to farm on a disputed farmland."

The above position was confirmed in an interview with the traditional ruler of Echara Autonomous community:

You see, in this community, no one person no matter how strong he is can say that he is greater than this community. Many people have tried it and failed. How many cases will I name for you. Many years ago, when we were disputing the land at Offia Okporo with Ekpomaka people, one man from this village decided to side the Ekpomaka people against his own people. What happened? We confiscated his portion of our community land and excommunicated him from having any relationships with other members of the community. After enduring the heat for only one year, he came back and begged us, otherwise he and his family would have died of hunger⁶.

Findings

12 of the proverbs analysed in this category stressed communalism as the preferred socioeconomic option (85% of the proverbs analysed) while only 2 proverbs (representing 14 % of the proverbs analysed) expressed views which showed that individualism was the preferred socioeconomic system. This is in line with conclusions from similar studies from South Africa (Kanwangamalu, 1999), Senegal (Gleason, 2003), the Middle East (Zeffane, 2014), Igbo (Moemeka, 1997,1998) and Ikwo (Eze, 2011) and it is consequently safe to say that the Ikwo worldview favours communalism as socioeconomic system aimed at promoting social harmony and economic development.

The next point to note about proverbs analyzed in this category is the demography of the respondents and the polarizing nature of their opinions. The ranks of the respondents are populated mainly by the older generation of male non-literate Ikwo people who are predominantly rural dwellers and who have no claim to western education. They outnumber the educated younger men and women respondents who have the privilege of western education and western influences, being urban dwellers. It is no wonder that their views tend to support the conservative socioeconomic system of communalism, and are prepared to defend and perpetrate the system even when it is out of tune with current economic realities. This finding is in line with the finding of the questionnaire analyzed in section 4.3.

The above point is significant because it confirms the use of Ikwo proverbs in their present form by the elders as an instrument for the exercise of power over women and the youth, and answers the second research question by identifying whose worldviews Ikwo proverbs represent. The implication of the above finding is that the Ikwo worldview on the above issue does not represent the views of all the interest groups in the Ikwo society.

These findings answer the first two research questions of this study – which worldviews are expressed in Ikwo proverbs and whether such worldviews represent the interests of all social groups. There remain the interests of those who Leach (1964) refers to as the "borderline, liminal category, partaking of both poles of the opposition, but belonging completely to neither"

(ibid, cited in Foley, 1997, p. 102). The identification of the liminal category and the proverbs that represent their view will be the focus of the last part of this chapter.

4.5. Proverbs of death and the great beyond

The analysis of proverbs in this category will focus on the belief system of the Ikwo society in matters relating to life and death as expressed in their proverbs. Specifically, the analysis will focus on the people's belief about the relationship between the living and the dead. The philosophy which underlies the Ikwo worldview in this regard is linked with the Igbo philosophy of life, death, relationships to fellow humans and to God. This philosophy is anchored on the two related concepts of the unity of all creation (Okwu, 1979; Duru, 1983) and the duality of the human existence (Kalu, 1994; Okpala, 2002; Nnolim, 2011) both of which the Igbos believe strongly in.

We see the first evidence of the Ikwo people's belief in the unity of creation and the fluidity of movement between the spiritual and the physical in the proverb which says:

1. *Te oku agutaru le mma be anyihu kwa le madzu*

Let fire picked in spirit is quench not in human

Let the fire fetched in the spirit world not extinguish in the physical world.

A costly project which has taken a lot of time and resources to accomplish, but which is threatened at the point of completion can be likened to a fire fetched in the spirit world that is threatened with extinction in the physical world. It is a tragedy which must not be allowed to happen, as explained by the young literate respondent who is a civil servant and lives in the city, and who quoted this proverb to drive home his resolve when a car he imported from the US was about to be impounded at the local police station for breaking the maximum age of used cars entering Nigeria. He quoted the proverb to buoy up his spirit of determination to fight and rescue his investment in the car from going to waste. Used this way, the proverb encouraged the respondent not to give up the fight in defence of a worthy cause, especially when the more difficult part of the fight had been fought.

The fire in the proverb is symbolic of a very important asset which a traveller needs to illuminate his path as well as provide warmth during the journey, while the two worlds represent the two phases of the journey, the spiritual being a more difficult phase than the physical. As such it would be a disaster for such a fire to extinguish during the journey. The fact that the fire should not extinguish even when the traveller has arrived in the physical world is also evidence that the physical world is not yet the destination of the traveller. He will yet travel back to the spirit world, and back, and forth, again and again. On the return journey to the spirit world, the individual would need the fire of good deeds to see him through the journey. And so, the cycle continues.

The proverb can be quoted as a source of encouragement to any one engaged in a task that needs long term commitment and perseverance not to give up easily in the face of challenges. For example, an elderly advisor might quote the proverb to a younger listener who is about to abandon a project to which he has committed a lot of time and energy, just when the effort needed to conclude it is less than what has been put into it.

The significance of the proverb if cited at that time is that it might supply the listener the moral support needed to carry through with the project. By drawing a parallel between a past

accomplishment and a present threat, the proverb enables the listener to draw strength and determination from past accomplishments to overcome present challenges.

Another proverb which conveys this belief very vividly is

2. *I gbalaa ru ejo madzu ngu agba kfube ejo mma*
You run from bad person you run meet bad spirit
If you run away from evil humans you will meet evil spirits.

This proverb quoted to me by a rural-dwelling, self-employed, non-literate widow who claims to have fought and won many battles both in the spirit and in the flesh, paints a very hopeless picture of the human dilemma in which the attempt to escape from the pursuit of one's physical enemies leads one to one's spirit enemies. It is a commentary on the futility of running away from the troubles of the world because they exist both here and hereafter, thus confirming the unity and continuity between the physical and the spiritual. The option advocated by the proverb seems to be to stand and fight the evil forces of the world and defeat them once and for all. This option is supported by another Ikwo proverb also by a self-employed, non-literate and elderly female respondent which states that:

3. *Onye I ka ike le madzu be I ka ike le mma*
Person you pass power in human is you pass power in spirit
If you overpower someone in the flesh you overpower him in the spirit.

Put together, these two proverbs serve to ginger a frightful person to brace up and challenge his challenger and defeat him decisively instead of running away, because running away will only lead him to face the same enemy in the world beyond.

Closely related to the above belief is the belief in dualism - that a man who lives in the physical world has a spirit counterpart called his personal god or *chi* living in the spirit world. He is only one half (the weaker half) of his whole self without his *chi* (the stronger half) which must guide him through life. As such any fortune or misfortune that befalls a man during his journey through life is believed to have been sanctioned by his personal *chi* in the spirit world (Kalu, 1994). One Ikwo proverb that is emphatic on this belief is:

4. *Onye nonu nweru mma edu iya*
Person living has spirit leading him
Every man to his guardian spirit

Egburu, a 65-year old village musician who is viewed by other members of the community as somehow eccentric and weird in his manners, and who quoted this proverb told me that he always quotes this proverb in response to his critics. He explained to me that he obeys the instructions of his guardian spirit in all situations and wonders why people expect him to behave according to their own expectations. This proverb means that all humans have two selves – the physical self and the spiritual self. The two make one unique individual, who is different from everyone else in the world. The spiritual self is expected to protect, guide and control the physical self. Every behaviour exhibited by the individual is attributed to the directive of his spirit self. This gives rise to the fact that people have unique ways of reacting to different situations according to the guidance of their personal *chi*. As such no two persons are expected to react in the same way to similar situations. The proverb is a justification of the personal idiosyncrasies exhibited by people in their approach to daily issues.

The proverb can be quoted in defence of any mode of behaviour that seems to be out of tune with popular expectations. It may be quoted by a person in defence of himself or by a sympathizer in solidarity with the person whose behaviour is under scrutiny. Used this way, the proverb aims to persuade people to accept difference as a fact of life; that every individual is a unique entity; and that no one standard of behaviour should apply to all without exception.

In the same way, a person is expected to live within the limits and grow at the pace set for him by his personal *chi*. Any attempt by man to live beyond such limits is courting disaster as we see in the proverb:

5. *Onye vuru chi ya uzo ya ogba gbua onwe ya le oso*
Person first God his road he runs die self him in run
One who runs ahead of his *chi* will race to death

In the race of life, run with one's *chi* as one's companion, one is expected to allow his *chi* to set the pace. It, therefore, becomes unusual if one chooses to set the pace in such a way as to outpace one's superior companion in the race. The obvious result would be physical exhaustion and death. The proverb is a warning against the dangers of trying to overreach one's innate capacity. It is akin to trying to be faster than one's shadow according to an English idiom.

The proverb quoted by a 73-year old, male urban dweller and retired school headmaster is quoted to an individual who is seen to be in obvious self-imposed trouble by aiming to achieve so much within a short period of time. For example, a young man who wants to achieve in ten years what takes other adults a life time to achieve could be quoted this proverb to caution against the dangers of over ambition. He is fond of quoting this proverb to youths who dwell in the urban centres and who have the get-rich-quick propensity. In the African context, it would be considered as over ambitious for an average young man to aspire to finish his education, get a job, build his own house, buy his own car and get married before his 20th birthday. Anyone found to nurture such ambition could be advised with the above proverb to take things easy. The significance of the proverb in such a situation would be to enable the young man to set more easily achievable targets in the long term, rather than short term targets that would exert enormous strains on him.

When someone's efforts seem to yield less than expected results, he is consoled with the proverb:

6. *Onye chi ya t'ekwedu, tebe atakwa iya uta*
Person God his not agree, don't blame him blame
Do not blame he whose *chi* does not agree

Like the one before, this proverb is based on the belief that there must be agreement between a man and his personal god before his efforts could yield desired positive results. If for any reason, the efforts of a man do not receive the approval of his *chi*, all such efforts will amount to nothing. It is under such circumstances that those in sympathy with the plight of the man in question would seek to console him with the above proverb.

The significance of the proverb is to shift the blame for failure to the gods. This has the effect of making the man feel less guilty for his failures. It might also drive him closer to his *chi*, in search of the solution to his problems. Whichever reaction it elicits from him, it leads him to acknowledge the presence of an external force in his affairs, a force he must come to terms

with to make progress in life. If despite all efforts to be great, a man remains poor, no one is expected to blame him, nor is it right to blame the man's personal god, because gods are beyond blame. This much was attested to by the community's 78-year old traditional ruler whom I approached for his perspectives on the proverb. He further affirmed the Igbo belief in destiny (Okpala, 2012), according to which the height a man can attain in life has been set by the gods even before birth.

People who go ahead to blame the less fortunate in society for their misfortunes and make jest of such are reminded that:

7. *Onu akoru onye uwa bu chi ya be akoru iya*

Mouth made (against) person world is god his is made it (against)

To make jest of the man of misfortune is to make jest of his god

It is considered beyond human powers to blame the gods, as we read in Rotimi's (1974) classical play, *The Gods are Not to Blame*⁷. However, some people who make unguarded utterances see nothing wrong in attacking fellow humans whom they see as having achieved below expectations in life, by branding them as failures. The above proverb is addressed to such people to make them realize that they are up against the gods, not against the human object of their attack, and as such should have a rethink. A wealthy 78-year old rural farmer who has the misfortune of not having a son despite having married many wives and visited many medicine men to no avail, told me he quotes this proverb to his adversaries and those who mock him for his misfortune to silence them as well as console himself.

The proverb could be quoted by the man being made jest of to his critics. First, he takes consolation on the proverb because it makes him feel less guilty for his failures. Second, he wants his critic to direct his criticism elsewhere. Thirdly, he hopes that his *chi* is listening and could have mercy on him. Whichever is the case, the proverb has the feel-good effect on the man of misfortune while reminding the critic to be more tolerant of others who are less fortunate in society.

The attempt to place the blame which rightly belongs to the spirit *chi* on the human actor, in a miscarriage of justice by humans is characterized by the Ikwo people as:

8. *Uwa woru eka a su le ogori egbua nwa.*

World catch hand they say that adultery kill child

A death endorsed by the spirits is blamed on the adultery of the child's mother.

One middle-aged female respondent, who has been tormented by the villagers for allegedly having a hand in the deaths of her children because of her alleged adulterous lifestyle, felt relieved to air her defence and protest her innocence through this proverb. Adultery in the Ikwo society has severe consequences. These consequences include the sickness and consequent death of the child or the husband of the woman who commits the adultery, or the woman herself if the necessary rituals are not performed to appease the gods. However, a child can die from other causes, and if steps are not taken to establish the cause of death, it could wrongly be blamed on the child's mother. When such happens, a human is blamed for an offence she did not commit. It is the gods who determine who should die and who should live. And since they are beyond blame, a death endorsed by them should be blamed on no one.

The proverb is quoted by the wrongly accused woman to her critics to assert her innocence, and divert attention from herself as the cause of death to other causes, in this case the sanction or will of the gods. The significance of the proverb in this situation is that it will lead to a further investigation of the cause of death, and if it is proved to be ordained by the gods, the woman is acquitted of both crimes of adultery and the deaths of her children.

Fortunately, the less fortunate in the Ikwo society are not left entirely on their own. The ever-present assistance of their personal gods is assured in the proverb:

9. *Eswi t'enwedu odzu bu chi ya achi jeru iya ijiji*

Cow not have tail is god its pursue for it flies

The cow without tail is defended against the attack of flies by its *chi*

A 45-year old literate urban dweller, a civil servant who was orphaned by the death of both parents very early in life, but who managed to grow up into a very successful man in the community provided this proverb to me as an explanation for his success in life despite his unfortunate beginnings. He believes that his personal god was good, and provided him the defence and assistance that his biological parents would have provided him, had they lived long. A child without the care and defences of his parents is likened to the cow without a tail which is constantly under attack by flies. The only defence against these flies is its tail which it flings intermittently around its body to scare the flies away. But if for any reason the cow has its tail cut or damaged in such a way that it is unable to perform this function, it must rely on external help to keep the flies away. This is where this proverb comes in to assure the cow that its personal god will come to its aid. The proverb is a metaphor for the availability of supernatural help for the handicapped. The cow without tail is symbolic of any physical incapacitation that prevents an individual from being able to take care of his daily needs, while the flies are the multitude of problems that confront people daily.

The proverb can be quoted to encourage anyone passing through difficulties not to feel despondent in the knowledge that help from God is always available. The victim can quote it to himself or a sympathiser can, as a mark of solidarity or sympathy for his plight. Used this way, the proverb has the potential of serving as a source of hope needed to carry on despite the difficulties of life.

And when disaster strikes, it is attributed to the design of the personal *chi* of the person involved as we see in the proverb:

10. *Iphe gburu oke bu uwa iya*

Thing kill man is world his.

Whatever kills a man is (according to) his world.

Men of courage and bravery use this proverb to encourage themselves or others to undertake very dangerous or risky ventures without fear of death. This is the case with the 68-year old, non-literate community warrior and fearless hunter who quoted this proverb and provided the explanation to it. According to him, death in the Ikwo culture is regarded as a necessary end to life on earth. It comes in a variety of unpredictable ways, such that no one has control of when and how it will meet him. By whatever means death comes, it is regarded as already ordained by the victim's personal god. The fear of death should, therefore, not be a deterrent to taking worthwhile risks. The same belief informs the adage that if a man is not killed by his *chi*, no one can kill him. This proverb means that by whatever means a man dies, it is accepted

that it is destined that he will die by that means. Therefore, there is no point questioning the circumstances and even the timing of a man's death since it is believed to have been predetermined by destiny. It is a metaphor for the futility of challenging a force beyond one's control and power. On the other hand, such a resignation should not drive one to inaction while waiting for death, as my respondent insists.

The proverb can be used to console the relations of victims of such calamities as untimely death when there are reasons to doubt that the victim deserves his fate, or where there is suspicion that someone else is the cause of the calamity or death. The aim of quoting the proverb is to minimize the witch-hunting that could result if the cause of death is probed further, by saying that even if someone took a hand in the calamity or death, the plan succeeded simply because the victim had been ordained to suffer in the hands of someone. That way, the peace and cohesion in the community can be maintained even when someone is suspected to have a hand in the calamity that befell another member of the community. On the other hand, it is used to ginger oneself or others to take worthwhile risks, irrespective of the danger of death, a perspective confirmed by my warrior respondent.

But quite often fortune smiles on a man by bestowing on him more than his deserved share of the good things of life. At such times, an Ikwo proverb reminds such a beneficiary not to think that he has achieved everything by his personal power. He is reminded to be thankful to his personal *chi*, respectful to elders and helpful to others, as captured in the proverb:

11. *Onye chi ya chetaru, ya chetakwa ndu odo*

Person god his remembers him remember people other

If your god remembers you, remember others

In the Ikwo culture, the expectation of humility and respect from the youth by the elderly can never be overemphasized. The 86-year old, non-literate community leader who quoted this proverb said that he quotes it often to remind successful young men of this cultural expectation, and not to allow their success to go into their head, but to remain humble, respectful and helpful. A man's personal god may remember him in many ways. In fact, every good thing that happens to a man is attributed to the help of his personal god, without which he can do nothing. Therefore, a man of fortune is regarded as the beneficiary of God's benevolence and should show kindness to others. Thus, the proverb is a metaphor for reciprocity and the extension of benefits received to others.

According to my respondent, the proverb means that God uses individuals as channels through whom providence reaches out to others with blessings, and such individuals are expected to ensure that such blessings are extended to others. This interpretation is echoed by another respondent, a youth who likened it to another Igbo proverb which says: *Onye chi ya gbaru ekeresimesi, ya gbakwaa ru Umunna ya* (person god his prepares feast, him prepare for kinsmen his) (If your god prepares a feast for you, also prepare a feast for your kinsmen).

The proverb can be quoted by an advisor to a young listener who is involved in self-praise or in disrespectful behaviour to less successful members of society as we read in Achebe (1958) when Okonkwo insultingly called Osugo a woman because he had no titles. The oldest man who was present on the occasion reminded him sternly that "those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble" (ibid, p. 19).

The view of the majority in this proverb category can be adduced from this interview with one of the respondents. The interview went thus:

Researcher: How do you relate with your ancestors?

Respondent: The way I relate with my ancestors is like the way a property owner relates with his property. *Madzu bu eghu mma doberu* ([A] Person is goat spirit keep) (A human is like a domestic animal kept by the spirits)

Researcher: Why do you say so?

Respondent: Because our life is not in our own hands. We are just walking around aimlessly, not knowing what the gods are thinking of us. If they decide to kill us we cannot do anything about it. We are helpless once they take a decision about us.

Researcher: Why can you not do anything about their decisions?

Respondent: Because they were taken before you were born, and you accepted them in the spirit world. Anything agreed in the spirit world cannot be changed in the physical world.

(Ugbala, 76, f, u)

The above notwithstanding, one Ikwo proverb tends to negate the people's belief in the overriding influence of the gods in the affairs of man as suggested in the proverb:

12. *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe*

Person agree god his agree

When a man agrees his god agrees also

This proverb by a literate young man who lives in the city and known for having a very strong will to the extent of being considered very stubborn by the rest of the community appears to represent the opposite of what all the proverbs before it represents. It suggests that if a man decides to do anything at all, his *chi* is bound to agree with him without opposition. This looks like a reversal of the relationship between man and his *chi* in which the gods decide and the man should comply - a reversal of the English proverb, "Man proposes, God disposes" (Manser, 2007, p. 182). To this extent the proverb appears to suggest the impossible or to contradict the Ikwo society's belief in the supremacy of the will of the gods over that of man.

The view of the minority in this category was captured in the words of one of them in an interview me.

Researcher: Why do you think you can work against the will of the gods for you?

Respondent: You see, if the gods wish me good, I will accept and allow their will to prevail. But if they wish me evil, I will reject it.

Researcher: How will you reject the evil wish of the gods against you?

Respondent: By obeying the laws of the land. If I don't commit any crimes against the land, even if the gods wish me any evil, Alikwo (Ikwoland) will rise in my defence because our people say that *Onye kota evu, evu a gbaa ya* (Person disturb bee, bee

will sting him) (The bee stings only those who provoke it). If I have broken no laws of the land, nothing will happen to me.

(John, 35, m, e)

But a close look at the above proverb in context will show that the proverb is not contradictory of this order at all. In the context that man is operating within the bounds of social norms, whenever he says yes, his *chi* will say yes also. But as soon as man deviates from such norms, his *chi* could say no when he says yes, thus allowing disasters to befall him. We see this in the life of Okonkwo in Achebe (1958). At the beginning of the novel, things go well for him in his quest to become one of the greatest men of Umuofia. So far it seems, he is saying yes and his god is agreeing with him. But as soon as he kills a clansman during a funeral, he falls out of favour with his *chi* and his fortunes begin to plummet. At that point, though he says yes, his *chi* says no. So, the key thing is operating within the will of god for man. Within this will anything he agrees to; his *chi* will agree to also. But outside the will, his *chi* could disagree with him.

So, although the proverb appears to contradict the 11 proverbs before it, we find that it only reinforces them, thus giving more credibility to the belief that the spiritual controls the physical as indicated by proverbs 1-11, and not the other way around as suggested by proverb 12.

When I engaged the traditional ruler of Amagu Community on the above issue, he had this to say:

Our people say that man is a goat kept by the spirits. They can decide to kill the goat any day. The goat will not refuse to be killed because it does not own itself. The same applies to us humans. The life we live and everything that happens to us is controlled by the gods of our land. That is why we are powerless when misfortunes befall us. In fact, everything that happens to a man here in the physical realm is according to the agreement he entered with the gods in the spiritual realm before he was born. And such agreements are irrevocable once they have been entered. That is how helpless we are before the gods⁸.

Findings

The key question in this category is who controls man's destiny – the gods or man. 11 of the 12 proverbs analysed in this category representing 91.6% of the proverbs suggest that more people believe in the supremacy of the will of the gods over that of man, while only 1 of the 12 representing 8.3% suggests the belief in the supremacy of man's will over his destiny. It can be said that the Ikwo worldview on the matter again polarizes the society into two opposing ideological groups (Levi-Strauss, 1963). This is also confirmed by earlier studies on the issue among the Igbo (Okwu, 1976, Okpala, 2002, Duru, 1983) and the Ikwo (Eze, 2011).

In this section as in section 4.4, the ranks of the respondents are populated mainly by the older generation of male non-literate Ikwo people who are predominantly rural dwellers and who have no claim to western education. They outnumber the educated younger men and women respondents who have the privilege of western education and western influences, being urban dwellers. As such the worldviews identified represent the views of the conservative generation of old men who are predominantly non-literate and rural dwelling pagans against those of the

forward-looking new generation of western educated youth who are mainly Christians. Again, these findings answer the first two research questions of this study.

4.6. Proverbs of gender relations

The analysis of proverbs in this category will focus on the perception of women in the Ikwo society by the menfolk with a view to establishing whether the women are perceived in positive or negative lights. Though studies have been carried out on the perception of women in the Igbo culture, (Oha, 1998; Hussein, 2005; Mmadike, 2014) no similar studies have been carried out on the Ikwo culture. Nevertheless, proverbs abound that, viewed from the surface level, tend to convey the impression that women are inferior to men in the Ikwo culture. One such proverb is cast in the mode of a challenge to women:

1. *Nwanyi su le ya bu nwoke te o nyiliedu mamini eli*
Woman says that she is man let her raise urine up
If a woman says she is a man let her urinate upwards.

At the surface level, this proverb quoted by a middle-aged, self-employed, non-literate rural dweller and husband of 4 wives relies on the physiological difference between men and women to challenge a woman to do what she is naturally not endowed to do if she claims to be a man, that is, urinate upwards like men are able to do by holding their penis and channelling their urine as they please. Where that is not possible, the point seems to have been made that a woman indeed cannot do what a man can do. At the deeper level, the proverb is used to call to order anyone who makes claims seen to be beyond him or her by challenging him to prove it. As such the proverb's meaning and use is not restricted to women but applies to both sexes, and used to remind people to live within the boundaries imposed on them by nature. It is the cultural message conveyed by the deeper level meaning that is of greater importance than the surface level message conveyed by the cultural image used (Permyakov, 1979). So the cultural message conveyed should be the focus of analysts rather than the cultural image used to convey such message.

Another Ikwo proverb of the same import uses the animal imagery to make the same point: "*Nkakfu su le ya bu ezhi tobena ude* (If the shrew says that it is a pig, let it howl)" The proverb relies on the same pattern of challenge for an animal considered less than the other to prove otherwise by doing what it is naturally not equipped to do, as a way of silencing the claimant into submission and acceptance of its situation as imposed by nature. But this meaning is still at the surface level. At the deeper level, the proverb shares the same meaning with proverb 1 above and can be quoted to any member of society (male or female) who is seen to aspire to assume any role considered beyond the capacity of such an individual to have a rethink and realize the limits of his or her ability and keep to such limits. It is used to remind someone to operate within one's natural endowment and not make bogus claims.

There is yet another Ikwo proverb that portrays both women and children as being oblivious of the difficulties of life and unrealistic and inconsiderate, especially when they are dependent on others to meet their needs. This proverb quoted to me by another middle-aged, non-literate and self-employed rural dweller states that:

2. *Agboko t'amadu le uwa du njo*
Maiden not know that world is bad

The young maiden does not know that the world is difficult

According to him the proverb applies to women of all ages and means that women do not pity men in all the sufferings they go through to meet their needs, which according to him is the reason why some women fail to accord men their due respect. But the same point can be made using the child imagery as in the proverb: "*Nwata akwo l'azu tamadu le ije du enya* (The child carried on the back does not know that the journey is far)" In proverb 2 the young maiden is unable to appreciate the difficulties of life because in the Ikwo culture, a newly married maiden's needs are completely taken care of by her husband until the next planting season when she is encouraged to start her own farm. Before then, all the pains of self-sustenance are taken off her. So, she does not know the difficulties her husband passes through to sustain her. As such, she fails to show restraints in her demands. Similarly, children who are carried on the back by their mothers on long distances are oblivious of the pains of the journey. As such when their mothers get tired and put them down to rest, they begin to cry and refuse to be set down.

The proverbs are quoted to anyone irrespective of sex or age who show signs of failing to appreciate the difficulties people are passing through to meet their needs, but rather make unrealistic demands. The aim is to call such a person to order to appreciate the efforts of care-givers.

Moral weakness or laxity in the upbringing of children is condemned in the Ikwo society with the proverb:

3. *Nkuta nwanyi zuru ataje ekwa oku*

Dog woman train eats egg hen

The dog trained by a woman eats eggs

The 66-year old, self-employed village man who quoted the above proverb told me that one of his wayward daughters is the product of her mother's upbringing. The proverb derives from the perception that the egg is a delicacy too precious for the dog, and is therefore, not usually fed to them. So, a dog can only eat eggs if it steals them. And only dogs trained by women end up stealing eggs as evidence of their trainer's moral laxity and incapacity to exert discipline. In this context, the dog is an allusion to a child brought up exclusively by a woman. He narrated to me how the woman in question had eloped with a younger man earlier into her marriage with him, and taken with her their only daughter. Years after, when the girl returned, she was already a spoilt child. She had been brought up among people of questionable character with whom her mother associated in the absence of her father, and she had learned their bad ways. Though the proverb portrays women as lacking the moral strength to bring up a child successfully singlehandedly, its deeper and wider implication is the danger of doing a job that one is not naturally equipped to do as the product of such attempt is bound to malfunction.

The proverb may be cited as a justification to discourage single parenthood, and to insist that the task of child upbringing should be a joint project between a man and a woman, especially if there is a case in point of a criminal behaviour by a child of a single parent. Under such circumstances, the proverb seeks to drive the point home by linking such a behaviour to the moral weakness of the child's mother. But it may also be cited in other situations not related to women or to child upbringing to encourage specialization or division of labour. It encourages

people to stick to roles they possess the necessary training and skills for, since everyone brings his personal character and ability to bear on any given task.

Other proverbs that portray women as unreliable and weak only seek to warn against relying on untested sources for support at critical times. One such proverb quoted by a 30-year old civil servant who had been disappointed by a woman he brought from the village and educated in the city in the hope that their combined earnings could guarantee a better life, says that

4. *Onye gide nwanyi meru eji vu iphe le ishi ekpori*

Person carry woman do pad carry thing in head bare

Whoever uses a woman as a pad is carrying his load on bare head

He explained that he had relied on his wife to help him with offsetting the high cost of living in the city in much the same way as the pad cushions the head from the weight of the load it was carrying, but he regretted that as soon as he finished training his wife in school, she eloped with a more educated younger man. According to his analogy, a pad is placed on the head before the load is placed on it to ease the pains of the load on the skin of the head. The proverb contends that if the pad is made of a woman, it is good as no pad on the head at all, because a woman is unlikely to live up to the expectation of alleviating the pains of the load on the carrier. It is thus, a metaphor for the danger of using an unreliable and untrusted ally in accomplishing a difficult task or embarking on a long journey. Here again the import of the proverb goes beyond the woman image, which cannot be followed literally because no one can fold a human being into a head pad. So, the meaning of the proverb is realized at the deeper level where the emphasis is on the danger of relying on any support that is not tested and trusted. While a woman may not be suitable as a head pad for bearing load, she is seen to be good at another role – talking, as we see in the proverb below:

5. *Nwoke luchaa ogu nwanyi enweru akuko*

Man finishes fight woman owns story

When the man does the fighting the woman does the talking

This proverb targeted at gossips was quoted by an urban-dwelling, literate female civil servant aged 45 years. She was visibly angry with fellow women for not taking active part in politics to better the lot of women, but who are content with sitting on the side lines and singing the praises of male politicians. In other words, here is a female activist, unhappy with the roles played by her female colleagues in Nigerian politics. On the surface, the proverb appears to assign role play in such a way that women play the weaker role while the men play the stronger role. But in as much as this proverb has a sexist colouring, its application is not limited to the female sex and role play only. The proverb means that people should strive equally to achieve success, and that no one should be content with watching passively and singing the praises of successful people. She explained that the proverb can also be used to condemn the attempt by anyone to take the glory for someone else's achievement, especially by women who talk about the success of their spouses or husbands as if it is their (women's) own success, in much the same way as proverb 6 is an attempt to reverse the crime/punishment order:

6. *Onu ria iphe ikpu akfua ugwo iya*

Mouth eats thing vagina pays price it

The mouth eats, the vagina pays

A grumpy middle-aged, non-literate village woman who is unhappy that her husband rarely rewards her for her hard work, while he lavishes all his care on her indolent co-wife quoted this proverb to drive home the sense of injustice she claims to suffer from her husband. Though this proverb uses the mouth/vagina imagery at the literal level, its figurative meaning is far removed from the images. It is used to condemn a situation where an individual is punished for a crime committed by another individual altogether, in what can be called a miscarriage of justice. Drawing her analogy from the relationships between men and women in which sex is used in exchange for money as in prostitution, she laments that while the mouth collects and eats the money, the vagina does the job of paying back for the money enjoyed by the mouth. This is considered unfair, and is therefore condemned.

Some Ikwo proverbs that stress the importance of attaining expected milestone in life use female imageries to make this point. One of such proverbs is

7. *Nwamgboko tseswee “bu onye muru?” yo bahu le “bu onye alu?”*

Girl outgrows “be who born?” she enters to “be who marry?”

When a girl outgrows “who is her father?” she enters “who is her husband?”

This proverb viewed literally is an attempt by society to define its expectations for women, namely, that there is a time in the life of every woman when society expects her to move from the status of someone’s daughter to that of someone’s wife through her entrance into the marriage institution. However, viewed at the deeper level the proverb is an anticipation of the attainment of life goals by everyone, male and female. It is a recognition that life is not static but made up of stages of growth and development during which certain landmark achievements are expected of the individual.

It was quoted to me by a 62-year old man who lives and works in the city, who had a grown up but unmarried daughter, and whom I mistook for his wife when I went to interview him. He quoted the proverb to support the fact that he did not blame me for the error because my expectation of her daughter was in line with the Ikwo culture’s expectation for a girl her age.

Failure to reciprocate kind gestures in the Ikwo culture receives the condemnation of the people, irrespective of whether the culprit is a man or a woman. Such condemnation can be made with proverbs 8 and 9,

8. *A lemeru anya, anya lemeru onye du iya mma*

One does (for) girl, girl does (for) person be her good

The more you care for a woman, the more she cares for whomever she likes

The law of reciprocity demands that love should be reciprocated with love, and kindness with kindness. However, when people fail to live up to this expectation, the above proverb could be quoted to the offender, irrespective of sex. In the above proverb, the woman in question fails to return the duty of care offered to her, instead she directs her care to someone else, in what looks like a love triangle. This leaves the carer justifiably angry, and this proverb could be quoted to try to cause a change of attitude. This was the reaction of a literate 32-year old policeman who was obviously hurting from the pains of unrequited love, and who quoted this proverb and offered the above explanation of it. He explained that while he struggled to meet the needs of his fiancée who was still in school at the time, she had kept a secret lover on whom she spent more than half of all the money he gave to her for her upkeep.

But beyond the male-female relationship surface level of interpretation, the proverb has the deeper meaning of condemning any failure to reciprocate for any acts of favour received by someone.

9. *A leecheru nwanyi, nwanyi leecheru okwa uri ya*

One thinks (of) woman, woman thinks (of) tray ink her

The more one thinks of a woman, the more she thinks of her make-up tray

A similar theme is the subject matter of proverb 9 in which the object that attracts the woman's attention brings into focus how far apart expectations can be from reality. Whereas the woman is expected to return her thoughts to the one thinking about her, her thoughts are to her make-up tray. This proverb which highlights the incongruities that exist in real life between expectations and real outcomes, was quoted by a middle-aged male lawyer who narrated to me how disappointed he was with his first son, who he planned to train up as a lawyer but who chose to play music instead. In fact, I had started the interview by asking after the boy in question, whom I perceived to be a bright boy while he was growing up. It was in bitter disappointment with the choice made by his son that he described him with the above proverb.

Even proverbs that appear to paint frightening pictures of women as wicked, insensitive and a source of danger to men, do so to convey messages that have little or no bearing to women at the deep level of analysis. Proverbs 10 and 11 are two of such proverbs.

10. *Nwoke nwanyi nuru nri ataje eja kwee le ishi*

Man, woman gives food eats sand nod at head

Any man fed by a woman eats sand and nods in approval

In the traditional Ikwo society, as in other patriarchal societies, the man is expected to take care of his wife, and not the other way around. Otherwise the man is considered as weak and as such should be prepared to endure any humiliation from his wife who might take the opportunity of the reversal of roles to lord it over him. The proverb means on the surface that any man who relies on a woman for his sustenance is bound to tolerate inhuman treatments from such a woman without complaints, having lost such power by shirking his responsibility of working hard to cater for his personal needs. It was quoted by a 48-year old literate but jobless man who was visibly angry at the unbearable insults he receives from his younger, but wealthier brother each time he approaches him for financial assistance. He quoted the proverb to show how his brother is taking advantage of his helplessness to humiliate him, and why he can take such humiliation without complaining.

At the deeper level, the proverb is a metaphor for the dangers of dependence on someone else for sustenance and the loss of human dignity that accompanies such dependence. As we can see the image used here involves both male and female and the deep cultural message conveyed transcends sex. It warns of the humiliation that comes with dependence. Used in this way the proverb aims to encourage hard work and self-reliance.

11. *Nji nwanyi oma awa ugu.*

Husband woman pretty faces war

The husband of a beautiful woman is constantly in danger

Quoted and interpreted by a 67-year old retired civil servant turned politician, proverb 11 also uses the combined imagery of male and female to convey the cultural message about dangers that follow the fortunes of life like wealth, political power etc. According to him, he has survived

many political assassinations planned against him by his political opponents, whom he defeated in elections. The beautiful woman in this proverb is symbolic of such fortune while the husband is symbolic of the custodian of such fortune. By their nature riches and power attract enemies who want to dispossess their possessor, thus putting them in constant danger. The above interpretation was confirmed by a wealthy business man who has been the target of many armed robbery attacks in the recent past. He also confirmed the truth in the surface meaning of the proverb with the story of a man who married a beautiful woman, and whose compound was constantly besieged by the young lovers of one of his wives, until one day he decided to take one of them head on in a fight and was killed in the process.

So, the male and female images used in this proverb only serve to convey the surface meaning, while the deeper meaning lie on a deeper cultural understanding of the context in which the images are used and what they represent.

The ambivalent attitude of all mankind towards the good things of life that are accompanied by risks is captured by the Ikwo proverb that uses a female image as we see in the proverb

12. *Nwanyi t'adudu mma alulu t'oodu ke ahaha*

Woman not good (for) marriage not good for leaving

A woman is not good to be married and not good to be left alone

Here again though the surface meaning suggests that a woman is difficult to manage and as such elicits ambivalent reactions from men, the deeper meaning goes beyond the woman/man relationship, and has implications for men as it does for women as well. The proverb reflects the ambivalence towards all good things that have risks attached to them. Here again woman is only representative of such good things that elicit the approach-avoidance reaction. An Ashanti (Ghana) proverb with a similar theme uses a combination of woman and blanket imageries in: "A wife is like a blanket: cover yourself, it irritates you; cast it aside, you feel cold" (Schnipper, 2003, p. 169).

The 80-year old farmer who quoted the proverb and confirmed its deeper cultural meaning also took time to narrate a personal story which confirms its surface meaning. According to him, as a farmer, his wives provided the assistance needed to cultivate the land and feed his family, in addition to bearing children. On those scores, a woman is an indispensable companion and helpmate. On the other hand, to be married is to carry the burdens of a woman and her children in addition to one's own, which he says leaves a man no room for respite throughout life. In his personal experience, though marriage brought him miseries, it made him a complete and responsible man in the eyes of other members of the society. So, while the benefits of marriage are compelling reasons to remain in it, its pains are also compelling reasons to quit.

I interviewed one of my respondents to find out the reasons for the negative perception of women in the Ikwo society.

Researcher: Many of your proverbs tend to say derogatory things about women. Why is this so?

Respondent: I think the problem is with our culture which regards men more highly than women. It even begins when children are born. If the child is male, the father is happy but if the child is female, the father will turn his back on the child and her mother.

Researcher: Why do fathers prefer male to female children?

Respondent: Because male children occupy the household of their fathers when they die. Women are given out in marriage to build another man's home. *Nwanyi bu okpo ufu onye odo* (Woman is base home person other). This means that a woman is the foundation upon which another man's home is built.

(Ekebe, 68, m, u)

Ekebe's reason that the woman is the base of another man's home is at the heart of the preference of male to female children in the Ikwo as in many other African societies in which inheritance is patrilineal (Falola, 2003). Under the system, males inherit their father's property at death. A man who dies without male children feels frustrated because at death all his labour might be squandered by distant relations. The male child also ensures the continuity of the family name, which could be truncated if only females are born in the family. They also provide the labour required to till the soil and provide food for the family. For these and other reasons, no Ikwo man is truly happy if he has no male child, even if he has many female children.

But not all Ikwo proverbs portray the female gender in negative lights. Many of them use positive images of womanhood to convey equally positive cultural messages, though such messages are not limited to the female gender as we have seen in the other proverbs analysed so far. The first of such proverbs uses the animal image of the hen to represent womanhood as we see in the proverb

13. *Ike t'agvujedu oku l'ogu nwa.*

Power not finish hen in fight (for its) child

The hen is never tired in the fight for its child.

The above means that the fowl's commitment in the defence of its chicks is without limit, and that the fowl is prepared to give its life in the process. At the deep level, the proverb is not only a tribute to women for their unwavering commitment to a course, and iron determination to succeed in the upbringing of their children, but also an encouragement to people engaged in any worthy venture not to give up no matter how difficult the task may be. At this level, the proverb aims to encourage resilience and tenacity as well as the spirit of never give up in the pursuit of set goals.

The proverb was quoted by a 44-year old female nurse, whose husband died quite early in their marriage, leaving her with 3 children to train alone. She told me that she had been greatly encouraged by the above proverb in times of difficulty in meeting the needs of her children. She explained that the proverb had both surface and deep implications for women since women are also often engaged in physical combats, just like the fowls, in the defence of their children.

14. *Tonwedu onye asuje l'ophe nne iya tere t'atsodu enaa*

Not person says that soup mother his cooked not taste sweet

No one says that his mother's soup is not sweet

The above proverb relies on the female to make the surface meaning that women are good at cooking sweet soup. This is obviously a complimentary remark in favour of women. However, at the deep level, the proverb is also a metaphor for self-pride and identification with one's own. This patriotic sentiment is one of the physical manifestations of the mental structures that

are so fundamental to Lévi-Strauss's theory, contrary to criticism that the operational variables of his theory are not verifiable. Note that the operational variables of his theory are such mental structures (deep structure of culture) such as religion, family, the group and the state/nation (Samovar and Porter, 2004). These are manifested in physical social structures and sentiments as follows: Religion is manifested in such religious denominations and sentiments as Islam/Christianity/Hinduism etc and radicalism/fundamentalism etc. The family is manifested in such institutions as kinship relations, marriage relations etc. Social groups are manifested in ethnic and cultural groupings etc. The state/nation is manifested in countries' forms of government such as monarchy, democracy and such sentiments as loyalty, patriotism etc.

The proverb encourages the proud acceptance of one's identity despite what others feel or say about you, as a demonstration of patriotism. This much was explained to me by 20-year old female school teacher who surprisingly spoke fluent Ikwo language despite being brought up in the city. She quoted the proverb to justify her love for the Ikwo language, as not to do so would be tantamount to the rejection of the self, which is exactly the point the proverb is against. She told me she also quoted the proverb to youngsters who were fond of copying foreign languages and cultures, while rejecting theirs to enable them to have a rethink and begin to accept and be proud of their own languages and cultures.

At the surface level, the proverb is no less truthful as every child believes that his mother is the best cook in the world, owing perhaps to the fact that the natural bonding between mother and child makes the child accept everything from his mother as the best, even if it is not necessarily so. In fact, the patriotic acceptance of the self does not give room for comparison of the self with the other. The proverb can be quoted to anyone who is unpatriotic enough to deny his roots or nationality. It can also be quoted in defence of one's identity, beliefs and actions.

The female respondent who gave the above two female-friendly proverbs had this to say in an interview with her.

Researcher: Very few Ikwo proverbs portray women in favourable lights. Do you think that your culture is fair to women?

Respondent: Our culture is unfair to us. We do more work both in the home and in the farm than the men, yet our efforts are not recognized.

Researcher: Do you like the way you are treated as a woman in this society?

Respondent: No, but there is nothing we can do about it because the men formulated our culture and make the proverbs that sustain it.

(Mary, 32, f, e)

Mary's answer and her resignation to fate are common reactions to the situation in Ikwo and many other African societies in which men exercise hegemonic masculinity over women in a sort of gender dominion, and in which proverbs are used by men to exercise power over women (Connell, 1995; Schipper, 1999). In such societies, the performance of proverb is tantamount to the performance of power (Granbom-Herranen, 2010).

The traditional ruler of Alike Autonomous Community spoke to me on this issue:

Our people regard a woman as a helper sent by God to help a man start and run a family. Therefore, a woman cannot go and marry a man and start her own family. Only a man can do that. In that family, the man is the head and he controls the woman. Never mind what people are saying that what a man can do a woman can also do. It is not true. Otherwise, let a woman go before the shrine of Agom Ugbala and make sacrifices and see if she will come out alive. Agom Ugbala will strike her dead for desecrating his shrine with her presence. Only men can do that. You see what I mean. I am not saying that there are no things that women can do better than men. They can look after children better than men. They can cook better than men. But those are less difficult tasks because they are not as strong as men. Men do the more difficult tasks that is how God made it⁹.

Findings

The key question in this category is whether women are strong in character or weak in character. Since 12 proverbs representing 85.7% portray the weaknesses of women while only 2 representing 14.2% portray their strength, one can say that most Ikwo proverbs view women as weak in character while only relatively few view women as strong in character. The finding is in line with the findings of earlier researches on the perception of women in many patriarchal societies in Africa (Falola, 2003), especially in Ethiopia (Hussein, 2004, 2005, 2009) and Igbo (Mmadike, 2014). As in the two categories so far analysed, the demography of the respondents remains basically unchanged.

4.7. Proverbs of the aged in society

On the perception of the Igbo culture concerning the aged and the elderly in society, we read in Achebe (1958, p. 6) of Okonkwo and his Umuofia community of Igbo land that "Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered." However, among the Ikwo people we cannot come to any such conclusion without any empirical evidence. So, the focus of the analysis in this category is to identify the perception of the Ikwo society on this issue. Specifically, the analysis will seek to find whether the elderly is contributing positively or negatively to societal development and why. Our first taste of the people's view of their elders comes from the proverb:

1. *Iphe ogerenya nodu anodu phu be nwata nyihuru eli oshi t'aphudu*

Thing elder stay seated see is child climb top tree not see

What the elder sees sitting down, a youth cannot see even from a tree top.

This proverb seems to credit the elderly with the possession of more wisdom than the youth by deemphasizing positioning or height in relation to wisdom acquisition. By positioning the elder in a sitting position and the youth (in a standing position) on a tree top, in their quest for wisdom, the proverb clearly places the elderly at an advantage over the youth, irrespective of their positioning. The advantage enjoyed by the elderly probably comes from the experience conferred by age. Thus, the proverb seeks to make the point that wisdom comes from age. It is also perhaps, for the same reason that age is respected among the Ikwo people as among the Igbos.

The proverb was quoted and explained by an 84-year old non-literate rural dweller and community leader who lamented the fact that some educated young men no longer respect the wisdom of the aged, claiming that western knowledge was superior to traditional

knowledge. It can be quoted to anyone who is seen to challenge the counsel of an elder in matters that are seen to be of traditional or cultural import, in which the youth, owing to age limitation cannot claim competence in. Such proverbs aim to convince the youth to accept the superior argument or advice of the elderly on the matter.

However, at the deeper level, the proverb has implications beyond accepting every advice from the elderly as being the best. It implies that experience confers knowledge which must be considered whether such knowledge is traditional or western, and whether it is possessed by a man or woman, youth or elderly. It seeks to emphasize respect for people with expert knowledge, and the need to seek for expert opinion on issues. This explanation was given by another elder but a literate female retired civil servant, who sought to correct the impression that the elders knew it all, and that the youths knew nothing.

Many Ikwo proverbs portray the elderly as not only possessing wisdom but also patience and tolerance. Such proverbs point to the usefulness of elders as people from whom we can learn the virtue of patience and tolerance. An example of such proverb is:

2. *Ogerenya bu ikpo ozu.*
Elder is pile/heap manure
The elderly is a dumping ground

The image of the elder as a dumping ground or dustbin is very graphic because dumping grounds in the Ikwo culture are mostly owned communally as families or as communities. The imagery invoked is that of the elder who bears the problems, the insults etc. of his family or community without complaining. In other words, most family or community issues such as quarrels, fights, crimes etc. are brought to the elder to settle. In the process, the elder may be insulted, sustain injuries, and incur financial losses to keep the peace. It is in this sense that the elderly must condone all manner of inconveniences, like the dustbin that welcomes all sorts of rubbish. An elder who discharges this cultural expectation becomes a reference point for patience and tolerance among the younger members of the society, explained the 84-year old elder who quoted the above proverb.

At the deeper level, the proverb looks beyond the elderly (male or female) to mean that custodians of the welfare of others should be tolerant of the excesses of those under their custody, in much the same way as parents tolerate the excesses of their children, older siblings tolerate the excesses of their younger siblings and husbands tolerate the excesses of their wives or vice versa. This much was explained by a 42-year old female school teacher and proverb enthusiast.

The proverb can be quoted by an elder in the face of abuse while discharging this cultural responsibility. At such times, it serves to remind the elder not to lose sight of the burden placed on him/her by the culture, and to forge ahead despite any such provocations or injuries or losses.

Other proverbs portray the elderly as provident, which is why one is encouraged to draw close to them by the proverb:

3. *Onye nodu ogerenya ntse, y'ophatiya ogu opha le nchi*
Person stay elder near he collects grasshopper stuck at ear
Anyone close to an elder takes the grasshopper stuck between his ears

In the above proverb, the grasshopper, which is roasted and eaten as a delicacy by children in many Igbo communities represent the many benefits that can be derived by drawing close to the elderly. These benefits range from guidance and advice to financial and other material assistance that flow from them not just to children but to other adults as well. I remember that as a child, you ran to welcome your parents or other grown up relations from the farm with your eyes glued to their ears. If you found a grasshopper stuck there, your day was made, and the adults went out of their ways to catch and bring some home to show their love and care for the younger ones.

Beyond the elderly, the secret to obtaining benefits from anyone irrespective of their age or gender is to draw close to that person. A middle-aged civil engineer and city dweller who quoted and explained the proverb maintained that mutual relationships benefit both the old and the young. According to him, the elder in the proverb was symbolic of anyone in possession of a treasure, while the grasshopper is symbolic of the treasure, whether material or immaterial. And it takes drawing close to the possessor of the treasure to partake of it, not otherwise.

The proverb is quoted to encourage mutual respect and a harmonious working relationship among all members of the society for the mutual benefit of all. It could also be quoted to any young man who sought to distance himself from his elderly relations in the false belief that they were past being of help in terms of the provision of material goods, to draw their attention to the fact that the elders provided something worth more than material things, and as such should not be kept at bay. One of such immaterial but invaluable assets possessed by the elderly is advice, the neglect of which can lead to serious consequences as we see in:

4. *Aphua t'eeekfu gburu ogerenya; ekfua t'aanu gburu nwata*

See not talk kills elder; talk not hear kills child

To see and not talk kills the elderly; to hear and not obey kills the child.

It is the moral duty of elders to speak up by way of advice or warning when they perceive that young people are deviating from the social norms of society. In the same way, it is the obligation of the young to listen to and follow the advice or heed the warning of elders. As such when things go wrong in society, anyone who is found not to have lived up to expectations is blamed for his failure, and no one receives blame for someone else's mistake. Moemeka (1997, p. 182) quotes the Igbo version of the proverb as: "To foresee danger and not to forewarn is the bane of elders; to be forewarned and not to listen is the bane of youth." People are held accountable only to the extent they fail to do their own part in an integrated system. The proverb is a metaphor for placing the blame squarely where it belongs and guards against negligence of duty. It looks beyond the elders and the children to apply to all members of society irrespective of age or sex. The 81-year old non-literate rural farmer who quoted this proverb said he used it to conclude his advice to youngsters as a way of absolving himself of blame in case they failed to heed, as often they did. However, anybody whose responsibility it is to advise becomes the elder in question irrespective of age, relative to the age of the advisee.

It can be quoted to warn of the dangers of negligence of duty; much as the elder can die from neglecting his duty to advice, the young can die from neglecting his duty of listening to advice. Used in this way the proverb encourages people to live up to expectations, whether they are at the giving end or at the receiving end.

The next proverb portrays the elderly as skilful and possessing expertise in whatever they do, as such should be relied on by the youths to acquire the necessary skills for success in life.

5. *Eke ogerenya taru aku be egbo iya agbaje iche*

Where elder ate nuts is shell it appears different

Where the elderly cracks palm kernels, the shells are different

This proverb relies on the image of an everyday activity to make the point that if experience and expertise are brought to bear on a task as common as the cracking of kernels, the result will be excitingly different. In this case the size of the shells will show that the stone was not applied too forcefully in the cracking process; the abundance of kernel seeds will show evidence that the seeds were not crushed by the weight of the stone. In all, less effort was used and waste was minimized. The case will be different if an amateur youth did the job.

The proverb is a metaphor for the benefits of skill and expertise that only come from age and experience possessed by the elderly, though not exclusively by them as younger people can, through training and experience. Here lies the deeper meaning of the proverb as explained by a 35-year old male respondent who prides himself as an experienced motor mechanic, and who quoted the proverb. He explained further that his customers value the final touch he gives to jobs done by his apprentice mechanics for the above reasons, and use the above proverb to compel him to give that final touch before they drive their cars away.

It is quoted as commendation to anyone who has achieved excellence in the discharge of his/her duties, irrespective of whether the person is old or young, male or female. The aim is to encourage excellence that comes from commitment and dedication to duty over a long period of time.

The elders are not only seen as experts and experienced in the performance of mundane tasks, they are also experts in the performance of spiritual tasks as intermediaries between man and spirits as expressed in the proverb:

6. *Ochee dike chia eja y'odu le e yeru iya ndu mmaa l'eka*

Old men offer sacrifice is like they put it people spirit in hand

When the elderly makes sacrifices, it appears to have been handed directly to the spirits

Sacrifices made by elders receive immediate responses from the spirits. This is evidence that the spirits also respect the elders either because of their age or their experience in presenting the sacrifices to them, or both. The efficacy of sacrifices made by elders is also a pointer to how close the elders are to the spirits, and leaves no one in doubt about the usefulness of the elders as intermediaries between the living and the dead.

The proverb is a metaphor for using the right combinations of material and methods to achieve desired goals much in the same way as the English idiom, "to place the round peg in the round hole or the square peg in the square hole" is a commendation for using the right instrument for the task at hand. According to a 71-year old wealthy village farmer, a respected community leader and a stickler for the right person for the right job, he said he used this proverb to convince his community on the choice of their candidate to the House of Assembly in the recently conducted elections in Nigeria. The elderly seeking the attention of the spirits to the needs of humans is symbolic of his candidate seeking the attention of the government to the

needs of their constituency. And he believed that his candidate was the right messenger to deliver the message to achieve the right results.

The proverb is quoted in praise of anyone who displays a sense of mastery and expertise in the execution of any given task with resounding success, the aim being to encourage the development and application of such expertise in the performance of day to day tasks. It looks beyond the elders to apply to all ages and sexes as well. The dividends derivable from such expertise is prompt or quick and positive results as we see in the next proverb:

7. *Ogerenya chita enya oji, ndu mmaa egebe nchi*

Elder carry eye kola, people spirit present ear

When the elder picks up the eyes of the kola, the spirits listen

When people meet in Igbo land (be it private or public) kola is usually presented as a mark of welcome and goodwill. During breaking of kola, a part of the fruit known as its eye is removed and held in the hand by the eldest person in the gathering to offer prayers to the gods and ancestors. Because even the gods and ancestors as well as humans respect the elders, they listen attentively to the supplications of such elders. The result is that whatever requests the elder makes during such prayer is believed to receive the automatic response of the gods. The proverb means that when the right person performs a task, the results are usually positive. This explanation, according to another influential wealthy 80-year old rural farmer means that the proverb also looks beyond the elder imagery to make the wider point of the right person for the right task as proverb 6, and applies to other male and female adults alike.

The proverb is usually cited in celebration of the positive outcomes of allowing the right person to perform a task. It can also be cited to discourage the use of an unqualified person to perform a task because of the risk of failure to achieve expected results. The significance of the proverb in the life of the people is that it safeguards against the performance of age related roles by people who are not qualified to do so. But the proverb applies to all similar situations where certain qualifications are needed to perform roles, whether the qualification is age, experience, gender, training etc.

The above perception of the elders imbues them with certain attributes of perfection and infallibility. As such elders are expected to live above board and not be associated with failure to act when necessary or to repeat mistakes as we see in proverbs 8 and 9.

8. *Ogerenya t'anojedu l'ufu te otsobere nku nmaa mini*

Elder not stay in house let fire wood soak water

The elder does not stay at home and watch the firewood drenched by the rain

In traditional Igbo societies, open space cooking is commonly practised. After a cooking session, the cooking utensils and the half-burnt firewood could be left outside till the next cooking time. But rain could fall in the interval between the cooking sessions, for example between the cooking of breakfast and lunch. During this interval, most healthy adults would have gone to the farms leaving only children and the elderly at home. It is now that the elder is expected to demonstrate a high sense of responsiveness by taking inside all cooking utensil left in the open, but most importantly, the pieces of firewood that could be ruined for the next cooking if allowed to be drenched by the rain. No elder is expected to fail in this duty. To do so is to disappoint the expectations of all from him. The proverb is a metaphor for being proactive and living up to expectations always. These attributes are not only expected from

the elders but applies to all adults irrespective of gender. The elder is only a metaphor for anyone old enough to act against an impending disaster, while the rain is symbolic of the disaster, and the wood is symbolic of the sufferer of the consequences of inaction. The 22-year old, non-literate female respondent who quoted and explained the proverb told me that women relied on such responsive and proactive adults or even children to save the day in the event of such unforeseen occurrences as rainfall while they are away to the farm or market.

The proverb could be quoted to blame anyone who is seen to have failed to live up to expectations, or to jolt someone into being proactive and live up to one's billings. By quoting the proverb, the Ikwo culture tends to remind its members not to shirk responsibility and to live proactively. Closely related to the above proverb is proverb 9 whose emphasis is on learning from one's first mistake.

9. *Ogerenya daru l'etsu ugbo labu shi le udele*

Elder falls at toilet times two comes from vulture

The elder who falls off the toilet twice is a descendant of the vulture

While it is human to make mistakes, and learn from such mistakes, the Ikwo society seems to offer only one opportunity for such mistake-and-learn experience to the elderly. The traditional Ikwo toilet was built by erecting two waist-high Y shaped pieces of wood on an open space far away from the residential houses. Another piece of wood is placed horizontally on top of these two to form the base on which people climb and squat to defecate. The urine passed in the process of defecation renders the horizontal wood slippery. As a result, people often slip off the wooden contraption and fall right into the pool of shit behind them and are smeared in it. Though this might happen often to children, it is not expected to happen to any adult more than once because of the expertise and experience attributed to him/her, otherwise it may be construed as a sign of irredeemable weakness. In fact, such an elder is associated with filth, the kind that is represented by the vulture, despised for feeding on rotten human flesh.

The proverb is a metaphor for the frustration that arises from failed expectations. According to 77-year old village opinion leader who quoted the above proverb, the elder in the proverb is symbolic of any experienced adult (male or female), the toilet represents the learning experience while the vulture represents an incorrigible failure. It is cited as a verbal expression of a sense of disappointment at anyone who is seen to have failed to learn from past mistakes by repeating such mistakes over and over. The strong view that such person is beyond redemption is conveyed by the proverb. It signals the giving up of hope on the individual concerned, especially when such a person is one held in high esteem as conveyed by the imagery of the elderly in the proverb. Its Igbo equivalent of the same import is: "*Agadi nwanyi daa ndaada naabo, a guo ihe o bu na nkata onu* (If an old woman falls twice, the number of items in her basket would be known)" (Oha, 1998, p. 101).

Further evidence of how highly the elders are held in the Ikwo society is conveyed by the proverb that suggests that the elder is beyond reproach as we see in proverb 10.

10. *Ogerenya mee iphe ochi echachi, echachi alaa uko/gbaa oso*

Elder do thing strike cane, cane gets scarce/runs away

If the elder commits a punishable offence, the cane will become scarce/run away

In a society where, corporal punishment is accepted as a way of disciplining children and adults alike for wrong doings, the special dignity accorded the elderly makes it unimaginable

to extend this form of discipline to elders, even when it is not in doubt that the elder in question has erred. The implication is that the elder is not openly blamed to spare him the shame of such open reproach.

The proverb is a metaphor for the concessions that accrue to people who occupy exalted positions in society. The result is that such persons are protected from public ridicule by the immunity they enjoy by occupying such a position. According to a non-literate 28-year old female respondent who lives in the village, the elder in the proverb is symbolic of any respected member of society; the offence represents any act unbecoming of such a person, while the cane that runs away is symbolic of the deserved sanction, but which is withheld. She recalled using the proverb to pardon her mother-in-law who once stole from her, and never mentioned the theft to anyone.

It may be cited to account for the reason why someone who is obviously guilty of an offence may not be punished for such offence. The aim is to emphasize how prestige earned can be called up to cancel minor shortcomings of an individual in later life.

The speech or pieces of advice of elders are highly valued in the Ikwo society. As such it never gets lost or overlooked as we see in:

11. *Okfu ogerenya evudu uzo yokperu azu*

Talk elder not first comes last

If the elder's speech is not allowed to come first, it will certainly come last

The opinion of an elder is considered so central in the life of the Ikwo society that nothing worthwhile should be undertaken without first seeking their opinion. If such elderly opinion is sought and followed, it is expected that the outcome of the venture will be successful. Under such circumstances, the elder's speech is said to have come first. If on the other hand this process is not followed, the venture may turn out to be unsuccessful. The elders will blame those who undertook the venture without proper consultation. Under such circumstances the elder's speech is said to have come last.

The proverb means that the input of an elder is so important that it must not be denied a place in the affairs of individuals or the community. But its implications go beyond the advice of elders. It extends to all knowledge and expertise possessed by experts on any issue whether such experts are male or female young or old. Their inputs come first or last depending on when it is sought. These were the explanations of a non-literate, 40-year old village-based musician who told me that he had learnt from a bitter experience never to undertake any serious venture without seeking the opinion of experts in the area. According to him he had embarked on ice fish business without proper consultation and had lost all his savings in the process.

The proverb is quoted to anyone who has undertaken an unsuccessful venture without seeking for advice. The aim is to blame him for such a self-inflicted failure, for had he sought advice the outcome could have been different. Used in this way it aims to condemn negligence of wise counsel and encourage the seeking of such counsel in future.

Respect is a duty owed to the elders by the younger generation in the Ikwo society. Any attempt to show disobedience or disrespect for the elderly is portrayed as having disastrous consequences as we see in the proverb:

12. *Nwata kfuwa nna iya egwu, akpuraku echipya ya enya*

Child throw father his dance tentacles strike his eyes

The child who subjects his father to dance on his laps will be blinded by his (father's) tentacles.

Only adults can make children to dance on their laps as a way of helping the children to do some exercise and develop their muscles in infancy. Mothers especially engage their infant children in this form of play after each bath. It is, therefore, considered ridiculous for a child to contemplate subjecting his father to such an exercise. It is tantamount to contemplating the impossible. However, the proverb as quoted and explained by a 79-year old retired policeman means that anyone who engages his superior in a power tussle is bound to face severe consequences as portrayed by the blinding of the eyes in the proverb. The proverb thus looks beyond the child and his father imagery to have implications for other adults involved in any relationship involving power imbalance. Another elderly retired church worker explained that the child is symbolic of a weaker, less experienced or less powerful party while the father is the stronger, more experienced or more powerful party in a deal. He recalled using the proverb to dissuade a splinter church group, which sought to take over the premises of their parent church by force, from continuing with such plans because of the serious consequences that might follow.

I conducted two interviews, first with an elder and then with a youth to relate the views expressed by the above proverbs to the views on ground.

Researcher: Do you think the elders deserve all the respect they get in the Ikwo society?

Respondent: Yes, because without the elders there will be no society. A society is weak or strong depending on the quality of elders in that society.

Researcher: Why do you think so?

Respondent: Because the elders bring order and discipline to the society starting from the home to the wider society. They ensure that our culture is upheld by sanctioning those who go contrary to our cultural norms and values.

(Nwali, 80, m, u)

Researcher: Are there any circumstances under which the elderly can lose the respect accorded them in the Ikwo society?

Respondent: Yes, if an elder engages in witchcraft he automatically loses the respect of the entire society. If he kills someone in the process, he is banished from the land irrespective of his age and status.

Researcher: Do you agree that the elders have a monopoly of knowledge according to some of your proverbs?

Respondent: The answer to your question is yes and no. This is because in terms of the history, tradition and cultural practices of our people, the elders may know more than the youth. But in terms of modern scientific knowledge, the youth are certainly ahead of the elders. So, no one has absolute monopoly of knowledge.

Researcher: Why do they know more proverbs than you?

Respondent: Because such traditional knowledge and proverbs are no longer passed down to children through the Ikwo language nor are they taught to children in our schools and colleges.

(Iruka, 38, m, e)

The above two interviews expose the relationship between the elderly and the youth in the Ikwo society in which the elders seem to demand the respect and obedience of the youth, and in which they exert power over the youth in a sort of generational dominion (Connell, 1995, 2005). The interview also reveals the reasons for the decline in knowledge and use of the Ikwo language, culture and its proverbs – they are no longer transmitted to the younger generation either in the home or in schools.

The traditional ruler of Unweka, the oldest community in Ikwo spoke to me on this issue:

The elders are next to the spirits. They are the representatives of our ancestors whom we cannot see with our naked eyes. They communicate directly with our ancestors. Therefore, their words are words of wisdom and truth. All the problems in the world today are caused by people who have refused to listen to the advice of our elders. They think that book knowledge is the same as wisdom from old age. When old man is talking he is not talking by his own power. Our ancestors are speaking through him. To ignore the words of our elders is to ignore the words of our ancestors, and grave consequences follow¹⁰.

Findings

In this category, the key question is whether the elders deserve the respect they are accorded in society or not. 10 of the 12 proverbs collected and analysed in this category, representing 83.3% portray the elders as deserving, and only 2 proverbs representing 16.6% portray them as undeserving. The finding is supported by findings of similar studies elsewhere among the Yoruba (Arewa and Dundes, 1964, Agbaje, 2002) and the Igbo (Moemeka, 1997).

4.8. Proverbs of children and youth

Children and youths are often seen as sources of joy and happiness to their parents. But sometimes they also bring sadness and sorrow. For example, in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, while Obierika's 16-year old son, Maduka was a source of joy and pride to him for being a promising child, Okonkwo was worried stiff by the prospects of his son, Nwoye taking after his grandfather, Unoka who was a failure. Comparing Maduka to Nwoye, Okonkwo says:

He will do great things... If I had a son like him I should be happy. I am worried about Nwoye. A bowl of pounded yams can throw him in a wrestling match. His two younger brothers are more promising. But I can tell you, Obierika that my children do not resemble me. Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies? If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit (Achebe, 1958, p. 46).

What is the view of children and youths in the Ikwo society? The analysis of proverbs in this category will focus on the Ikwo society's perception of its children and youths, with a view to

establishing whether they are viewed negatively or positively, seen as assets or liabilities or as menders or breakers.

The first proverb in this category tends to portray children in positive lights as good learners as we see in the proverb,

1. *Nne egbu ata ewu nwa iya ele iya enya l'onu*

Mother goat chews grass young its looks it eye in mouth

When mother-goat is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth

Though this proverb uses the goat imagery, its message is directed at humans. The proverb means that the young should learn actively from the older people around them without necessarily waiting to be told what to do. In other words, the proverb encourages learning by imitation, thus complementing the adult virtue of teaching by example. The proverb may be used by any adult care provider to point the way to the younger ones on the need to pattern their words and actions after those of their responsible parents or other adults around them.

According to a 73-year old self-employed wood carver who quoted and explained this proverb as an instrument of character moulding in the Ikwo society, the proverb has positive and negative implications, the above explanation being the positive. Its negative implication is that every misconduct engaged in by adults in society are being actively copied by children, hence the need for adults to display exemplary behaviours always. Thus, when an adult misbehaves, this proverb may be quoted to remind him of the harm his conducts may be doing to society, if copied by children. Used in the above circumstances, the proverb aims to get children and youths as well as adults to behave in more culturally acceptable ways.

At the deeper level, therefore, the proverb looks beyond the mother and child imagery to point to a very important cultural message, namely, the need for adults to exhibit characters worthy of emulation before their children and youth. This is because they lack the maturity to discriminate between the good and bad, and may copy every adult behaviour as good, to the detriment of society.

Children and youth are also portrayed as teachable and amenable to correction by many other Ikwo proverbs. These include:

2. *Okfuru t'akajedu onye kuru iya*

Okra not pass person planted it

The okra does not grow taller than the person who planted it

The 76-year old village medicine woman who quoted the proverb explained that the relationship between the child and its parent or care-taker is mirrored here by the relationship between the farmer and the okra planted and nurtured mainly by women in the Ikwo culture. According to her, the fact that the okra can grow physically taller than the farmer does not mean that it has overgrown the control of the farmer. It remains under the farmers control no matter its height. In the same way as the okra looks up to the farmer for care and direction, the child also relies on its parents for care, protection and instructions on how to grow up into a responsible adult. As such, what the child becomes is what the parent makes of him. So, it is a mark of failure on the part of the parent if the child grows up to be irresponsible. And to say that the child is too difficult to manage is to accept parental failure because, the child like the okra is amenable to the control of the parents.

The proverb may be quoted to the parent who abandons his parental responsibility under the guise that a child is too difficult to manage, to make such a parent live up to his parental responsibility by enforcing strict discipline in the upbringing of the child. It may also be quoted to a child who is seen to be so stubborn as to resist discipline from his parents. In this case the aim is to get the child to submit to parental discipline and control.

However, at the deeper level, the proverb deals with the power relationships between superiors and their subordinates at all levels, in which it is inconceivable that the inferior can successfully revolt against the superior except by negligence or laxity on the part of the superior power. Hence it is expected that the superior power should constantly keep the subordinate in check.

In any case, society views problems with child upbringing more as the fault of the parent than of the child as demonstrated in proverb 3:

3. *Egirima du lobu ome nji, eke e koberu iya ya ekoru*
Children be like tender yam, where one hangs it, it hangs
Children are like yam tendrils, they follow direction

This proverb clearly absolves the children of any blame in any case of failed child-upbringing. It likens the child to the yam tendrils which are very amenable to the farmer's directives as to which direction it should grow. In the same way, children are too innocent to choose their own parts through life in their formative years. It is the responsibility of parents and care-givers to give that direction, failure of which should not be blamed on the child but on the parent or care-giver.

The 56-year old wealthy farmer who used his yam farm to demonstrate this proverb to me said that the proverb is usually directed at parents who are failing in their duties as parents and who tend to blame it on their children, to make them realize that the problem is with them as parents; and that the child is by nature dependent on them for direction. A problem arises when parents fail to provide such direction through discipline and exemplary lifestyle. The significance of the proverb is that it is a wakeup call to parents and care-givers to brace up to their responsibilities in the upbringing of children entrusted to their care.

At the deeper level, he explained that the proverb looks at the issue of leadership and followership and tends to portray children as followers and the farmers as the leaders. Followers follow the direction of their leaders. As such when there are social problems, the leaders should not blame the followers, just as parents should not blame their children for failures of upbringing.

The children are also seen as active participants in the process of their upbringing by being proactive through asking questions about issues that confuse them as they grow up. We see this in the proverb,

4. *Nwaaji t'ephujedu uzo*
Inquirer not miss road
The child who asks questions does not miss his way

The journey of life from the cradle to the grave is mirrored in the physical journey of a child to an unknown destination. To get to such a destination, the child must develop the habit of asking questions along the way; otherwise, he will miss his way. And children are known to

be good at asking questions, hence this proverb is an endorsement of that habit. The proverb is thus a metaphor for the merits of being an inquisitive mind and an active participant in the process of growing up.

The proverb may be quoted by an adult care-giver to a child who is seen to go through life without seeking the guidance of parents and other older adults to point to him the danger in doing so and introduce him to the benefits of seeking assistance and guidance. The above is at the surface level, according to the non-literate 30-year old rice farmer who told me he has consistently applied the principles of the above proverb in his daily life without regrets. At the deeper level, however, he explained that the proverb applies to adults, male and females alike more than it applies to children. According to him it seeks to remind all adult members of the Ikwo society to seek to understand the Ikwo culture and act within such cultural norms always. People who have doubts or questions about such cultural practices are directed to the custodians of the culture and tradition for clarifications and direction.

At this level, it may be quoted to adults who show tendencies of doing things without seeking for guidance and assistance from specialists or those who know more about the issue in question. In all, the proverb aims to encourage people to seek help and advice in dealing with life's problems.

Beyond acknowledging the inquisitive nature of children, one Ikwo proverb specifically attributes wisdom to youths as we see in proverb 5:

5. *Nwaije ka onye ishi ewo omaru iphe*

Traveller pass person head grey know things

The adventurous youth is often wiser than the sedentary elder

This proverb seems to endorse the importance of travel as a very important component of learning. Youths are seen to have some advantage over the elders in this regard, for whom travel and education are their strong points. The educated and travelled youth is thus seen as able to surpass the wisdom of the elderly owing to exposure to different experiences and ways of life compared to the limited experiences of the untraveled elder. The proverb is thus a metaphor for the cultural enrichment that arises from intercultural communication and interaction as we witness in a global world (Jandt, 2013).

The young literate unemployed school leaver who hotly contests the import of the proverb that implies the direct opposite of the above (Proverb 1, section 4.7) argued that the proverb looks beyond the immediate cultural environment in which the elder may be advantaged. It looks at the wider context of the new knowledge and new cultural experiences that youths bring into a culture by way of education or travel, and argues that in that regard, the youth is more informed than the elder. At the deeper level, the proverb seems to endorse the currency of the modern over the ancient and how the modern is usually a hybrid that combines elements of the old and the new with influences from outside the two to produce a better whole.

The proverb tends to counter the proverb: *Iphe ogerenya nodu anodu phu be nwata nyihuru eli oshi t'aphudu* (What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see even from a tree top) earlier discussed in this chapter, and may be quoted in support of the position taken by a relatively younger person engaged in argument with an older person. While the strength of the argument of the older person may derive from his experience based on the wisdom of old, such arguments may successfully be countered by appeal to the more modern trends. In

the process, a common ground may be reached by marrying the old to the new to forge the way forward.

Many Ikwo proverbs portray children and youths as brave and fearless and can achieve as much as adults. The first of such proverbs paints the picture of a child orphaned early in life by the death of both parents, but who occupies his father's compound alone despite his young age, in demonstration of rare courage and bravery.

6. *Nwamma t'atsujedu egvu l'okpo ufu nna iya*

Child not harbour fear in desolate compound father his

The child is never afraid in his late father's compound

The picture painted here is the picture of a desolate homestead haunted by the spirit of the dead, yet the child is not scared into abandoning it. It is a rare demonstration of the readiness to defend one's heritage no matter the odds. According to another young but non-literate rural-dwelling respondent, the above is the surface meaning of the proverb. At the deeper level, the proverb celebrates the virtues of bravery in whatever form, and looks beyond children and youths to apply to adults as well. The will to defend one's position or stand against all forms of attack or opposition is praised by this proverb using the imagery of the orphaned child, bereft of parental defences. Yet he is not deterred.

The proverb may be quoted to encourage oneself or to encourage others facing overwhelming challenges to be encouraged by the example of the orphaned child, who was not frightened by the enormity of his challenges and the absence of external support or defence. The aim is to encourage the challenged to face up to every challenge of life fearlessly.

The next proverb is in praise of a child who achieves feats thought to be the exclusive reserve of adults, as such achievements fast track his movement into adulthood. Having achieved adult feats, it is no longer possible to deny him the privileges of adulthood as we see in the proverb:

7. *Nwata t'abujedu nwata l'anu o gburu*

Child not be child in animal he killed

A child cannot be a child in the sharing of the animal that he killed

A 39-year old non-literate male respondent and a village hunter explained that during communal hunting expeditions in the traditional Ikwo society, children and adults have equal chances of striking the last blow that kills the target animal. Such a person is automatically entitled to the head of the animal when the spoil is shared. When a child delivers the last blow (as happens often) the child is entitled to the head of the animal. To deny the child that privilege because of his age is gross injustice which the above proverb seeks to condemn. At other times, a child or youth can embark on an independent hunting expedition and achieve feats unequalled by adults. It would then be unfair for any adult to take the credit for the child's achievement. The point being made by this proverb is that children and young adults can achieve feats thought to be the preserve of adults; and that at such times, the credit should not be taken away from them.

But the proverb message also extends beyond children and youths to include situations where the weak and least favoured does achieve feats thought to be the preserve of the strong and mighty in society. It is quoted in defence of the rights of anyone whose right is seen to be

taken away because of his inability to protect or defend such rights. The aim is to restore such rights to whom it rightly belongs.

The same scenario as above is at work in proverb 8 where membership of a dance group is dependent on contributing some yam tubers to the group as we see in:

8. *Nkwa nwata turu nji ya, be o bu ogbo iya*

Dance child contributes yam his, is he be age it

The dance to which a child contributes his yams, to that he belongs

Having fulfilled the requirements of belonging to the group, the fact that he is under age is not enough to deny the child membership of the group. It is often the case that a child can afford the criteria for joining a dance group even though some adults are unable to afford it, which is a credit to such a child's prudence and hard work, explained the literate middle-aged female respondent who quoted the proverb. According to her, the proverb aims to defend the child's right to membership of the group despite his age. But this is at the surface level. At the deeper level, it is a celebration of hard work and a defence of the title to the rewards arising from it.

As in the one before, the proverb can be quoted in defence of anyone whose entitlement is about to be denied for reasons of inability to defend such a right.

One other proverb that anticipates the achievement of adult feats by children and youths is:

9. *Nwata kwoo eka ya etsoru ogerenya ria nri*

Child washes hand he follows elder eat food

When a child washes his hands, he dines with the elders

A retired 83-year old male respondent explained that the proverb image is built around the fact that the average child is usually unable to wash his hands clean enough to be able to join adults at table. If, however, contrary to expectations, a child can wash his hands clean enough to receive the approval of the elders, he is entitled to the privilege of dining with the elders. The proverb is thus an invitation and an encouragement to children and youths to strive to attain adult goals and enjoy adult privileges.

Its message looks beyond children and the youth to encourage people irrespective of age or sex to strive to attain high positions in society through hard work to enjoy the privileges associated with such attainments.

The following proverbs portray them as sensitive and thoughtful and can interpret and react positively to fair treatment as we see in:

10. *Emee nwata ege emeru ibe iya obu adu iya mma*

Do child as did mates his heart be him good

If a child is treated like his mates he will be happy

The sense of justice and equity demonstrated in the proverb and the appropriate response exhibited by the child is an indication that children, like adults possess the sensitivity to appreciate good gestures and to respond accordingly. However, the cultural message of the proverb has implications beyond children and youths. Its emphasis is on the positive outcomes of treating equal situations equally. In other words, the need to be impartial and avoid favouritism in line with the English proverb that "what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander" (Manser, 2007, p. 293.)

The 54-year female lawyer who quoted and interpreted the above proverb said that it may be quoted by the victim of unfair and partial treatment to the one perpetrating the injustice to demand that his due be given to him. In quoting the proverb, the victim aims to appeal to the conscience of the perpetrator to change his mind and apply equal treatment to all concerned.

Children are portrayed as being generally obedient by Ikwo proverbs as we see in:

11. *Nwata eje ntukpekpe ozhi ya eri ntukpekpe iphe*
Child goes mini errands he eats mini things
The child who runs errands eats the errand food

This proverb uses the imagery of children as errand goers and the rewards they receive as a result to drive home the benefits of obedience. So, explained a 44-year old village housewife and mother of four. But this is the surface meaning of the proverb. At the deeper level, she explained that the proverb deals with the relationship between superiors and subordinates in general. If the subordinate is obedient to his boss, he is bound to enjoy the material rewards associated with such obedience, or lose such rewards if the subordinate is disobedient. The obedient child is symbolic of the subordinate partner in the relationship while the errand food represents the rewards for compliance. The proverb is thus a metaphor for obedience and the rewards that result from it.

At its surface level, my respondent told me that she uses the proverb together with the material incentives it promises, to invoke the spirit of competition among her children in the performance of house chores, and in that way, improve productivity in the house. Adults also apply the principles enunciated by the proverb to gain favour from their superiors.

The above positive portrayals of children and youth notwithstanding, there exist many proverbs that tend to portray them in negative lights. One of such proverbs portrays them as lacking the ability to spend resources wisely as we see in the proverb:

12. *Nwata ata akara ata ego iya*
Child eats beancake eats money his
The child eating bean cakes is eating his money

A profligate child according to another middle-aged housewife spends all his money on bean cakes, a delicacy enjoyed by children during break time at school. This usually leaves the child with no money to spend on other more important school items such as books, pen and other learning materials. Clearly the child is portrayed as lacking the ability to channel resources to those things that matter most. At the surface level, this proverb is a wakeup call for such a child to save his money for the more important items.

At the deeper level, its cultural message goes beyond children and youth to apply equally to all people irrespective of age or sex. It highlights the need to allocate resources to the more important needs of life instead of squandering them on the unnecessary pleasures of life. The proverb condemns the improper ordering of priorities and can be used to advise people to get their priorities right. For example, my respondent told me she advised her extravagant younger brother to save his money for the training of his children instead of spending it on costly shoes and dresses, and ended her advice with the above proverb.

So, the proverb can be quoted to anyone who is seen not to get his priorities right, to channel his resources according to more important uses. Resource allocation goes beyond budgetary

issues and extends to all behaviours that amount to the squandering of valuable resources such as time, emotion, energy and other material possessions. So, prudent management of scarce resources is the chief message of the proverb.

Others portray them as prone to hasty or ill-timed action as we see in the proverb:

13. *Nwata t'erudu eruru choo iphe meru nniya, iphe meru nniya emee ya*

Child not reach level search thing did father his, thing did father his do him

The child who looks for what killed his father prematurely, the same will kill him

The 85-year old male village farmer who quoted the proverb traced its origin to the traditional Ikwo society known for its bravery, when an orphaned child who grows up to learn that his father did not die a natural death is usually in an undue haste to revenge the cause of such death. But such a child must wait until he is more powerful than what killed his father to be able to accomplish the mission successfully; otherwise, he may suffer the same fate as his father.

Though the proverb uses the child imagery to condemn hasty or ill-timed action, its deeper meaning goes beyond the child to apply equally to adults. The cultural message is that people should only confront challenges when they are adequately equipped to overcome such challenges. It highlights the danger in undertaking any major project without adequate preparation, and may be quoted to warn against the unpleasant outcome of embarking on such a project, the aim being to persuade the person to abandon such course of action, and avoid the humiliation that could follow.

Finally, some proverbs tend to suggest that children and youths can be stubborn, wicked or mischievous as we see in proverbs 14 and 15:

14. *Nwata gbee igbe tua ngu nvo, gbee igbe tulata iya*

Child does creep pinch you nail, do creep repinch him

If a child creeps up to you and pinches you, creep up to him and pinch him back

The above proverb according to a retired civil servant who lives in the city, and who quoted it means that a child who pretends ignorance of the pains caused by pinching someone else should be taught in practical terms by pinching him back. But this is the surface level meaning of the proverb. At the deeper level, the proverb has implications beyond the child imagery it uses. It means that wicked people and mischief makers should be paid back in their own coins to serve as a deterrent to others.

According to him, he used the proverb recently to encourage one of his children to fight off a younger child who was fond of perpetrating different forms of harmful tricks on fellow children in their neighbourhood. After fighting back, his son confirmed that the tricks stopped as abruptly as they started, because the offending child had been fed his own bitter pill. Even among adults, the proverb can be used to fight back against unprovoked attacks, verbal or otherwise, perpetrated by someone who feigns ignorance of the damage they are causing through their action.

The significance of the proverb if used in the above circumstances is to ginger the victims of any unwarranted attacks to fight back against their attacker as a way of bringing such attacks to an end. The same theme is taken up in the next proverb:

15. *Nwata suru le nne iya t'ekudu mgbenya, t'ekuje kwaphu mgbenya*

Child says that mother his not have sleep not have also sleep

The child who says his mother will not sleep, will not sleep also

The child in the above proverb is mischievous in the Ikwo culture because by crying all night, he is deliberately determined to deny his mother the chance to sleep, according to my 86-year old respondent, an elderly grandmother. However, whether the child knows it or not, he shares the sleeplessness equally with his mother, since he must be awake to keep his mother awake. In fact, crying in addition to sleeplessness means that he carries more burden than his mother.

At the deeper level, the proverb means that perpetrators of mischief share in the consequences of their action, and as such should have a rethink. My respondent recalled quoting the above proverb to persuade a well-known litigant who is known to have spent a lot of money in filing frivolous court cases against his neighbour to desist from such activity in view of the harm it is doing to his personal resources and reputation.

An elderly parent who spoke to me on the perception of children in the Ikwo society had this to say:

Our children are our inheritance, our pride and our strength in old age. Any family where they are lacking is incomplete, and there will be no joy. It will appear as if the family lacks God's blessings and is cursed.

Researcher: Of what practical benefit are children to the family and society?

Respondent: Children are great assets to the family and society. They run household errands, help in the farms and other businesses of their parents. They also look after their younger siblings in the absence of their parents. In old age, they look after their parents and other members of their extended family. When the girls are given out in marriage, the boys stay behind to take over and occupy their father's compound. In the wider society, they provide the human and material resources required to build and develop the society.

(Omenyi, 80, m, u)

On the measures taken to correct deviant children in the Ikwo culture, another respondent had this to say:

Researcher: Are there circumstances under which the child is considered a curse to his parents and his society:

Respondent: Yes, when children deviate from obeying their parents and the laws of the land, they become a source of worry to them. Some who engage in criminal activities like stealing, drug taking, rape and other criminal activities constitute a source of terror to society.

Researcher: How does the society deal with such deviant children?

Respondent: This is when our culture as an instrument of character moulding and our elders as agents of child upbringing have a lot of roles to play. In our society the training of the child is taken as a collective responsibility in which every member of society has a role to play. This is in line with the saying that *Nwa bu ke oha* (Child is for all).

Therefore, the society takes it upon itself to correct the erring child irrespective of whose child he is. While training or correcting erring children, relevant proverbs come in handy to drive home the lessons intended. In that way, deviant behaviours are minimized in the Ikwo society.

(Felicia, 38, f, e)

The above view of children in the Ikwo culture was confirmed by the traditional ruler of Ekpomaka community in a chat with me in his palace:

Children especially the male ones are the strength and pride of their parents because they are supposed to look after their parents in old age and inherit their fathers' household when they die. The greatest misfortune that can befall an Ikwo man is not to have a male child. First the society will see you as a cursed man, that is why the gods want to cut your generation. Second, you see yourself as working for your enemies because when you die, all your wealth will pass to distant relations. Thirdly, the joy of parenthood is lost if there is no male to pass on the family name to. It is because children are considered a source of joy that men go to great lengths to have them, especially the male ones¹¹.

Findings of analysis

The key question here is whether children and youth are considered as assets or liabilities to the society. But since 12 proverbs representing 80% of the proverbs analysed see children and youth as assets, while 3 proverbs representing 20% of the proverbs analysed see them as liabilities, it is safe to say that there is a strong tendency favouring the younger as assets. This tendency is not surprising and is corroborated by the findings of similar studies in Africa and elsewhere, hence the strong emphasis on their education as the best guarantee for the future of any nation. We see this emphasis from researches from Ghana (Boateng, 1983), Yoruba (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2002, 2003) and Igbo (Marah, 2006).

4.9. Proverbs of man and nature

The relationship between man and nature has remained an area of interest to researchers over the years because of the influence one has on the other. In other words, man influences nature as much as nature influences man (Opata, 1990; Klein, 2000; Fanany, 2000). Unfortunately, none of the above studies is based on the perception of nature by the Ikwo culture.

The aim of the analysis in this category is to find out the perception of the Ikwo society regarding nature. Specifically, the analysis will seek to establish whether nature is perceived as a friend or foe, beneficial or harmful etc. in Ikwo proverbs. The first proverb in this category shows that the Ikwo society see nature as teacher as we see in:

1. *Uzu t'amadu okpu ogele lee egbe enya l'odzu*
Smith not know (to) mould gong look kite eye at tail
The blacksmith who does not know how to mould the metal gong should take a close look at the kite's tail

The 81-year old male respondent, a successful farmer who quoted the proverb explained that the kite (a type of bird) is a natural phenomenon that is readily seen by everyone in the traditional Ikwo society as elsewhere in the world. However, to the Ikwo society, the bird has a lesson to teach, particularly to the blacksmith who by taking a close look at its tail can produce very beautiful and high-sounding metal gongs. The proverb's emphasis is that it is an education, provided free of charge by nature, to just watch this magnificent bird as it hovers over the Ikwo airspace. The above is the surface meaning of the proverb.

At the deeper level, the proverb is a metaphor for learning by imitation, and recalled using it to remind learners, especially his children that natural sources of learning abound in the natural environment. For example, he told his children that if they wanted to be successful farmers, they should learn the skill by taking active interest in his activities as a farmer. Used in this context, it is aimed at encouraging the lazy learner or the under-achiever to put to good use the abundant learning resources available to him and stop giving excuses for his failures.

The proverb message looks beyond the blacksmith and kite imagery to apply to other people and all areas of life where there is need to apply the cognitive skills in finding solutions to life's problems, without waiting to be told what to do. To this extent the proverb aims to inculcate the ability to draw lessons from life's phenomena to address personal challenges. In fact, most Ikwo proverbs that draw their imagery from nature tend to use such natural phenomena to teach one lesson or the other as we see in the next proverb that uses animal imagery:

2. *Egbe rukfuru nwoku, nwoku erukfuru mbashiride*

Kite pursues chick, chick pursues earthworm

The kite goes after the chick, the chick goes after the earthworm

The above proverb, explained another elderly respondent, a retired school head teacher, brings three animals together in a power relationship where the power hierarchy that exists among the three is brought into focus. The kite is obviously more powerful than the chick, while the earthworm is no match for the chick. So, while the kite preys on the chick, the chick in turn uses the earthworm for its snack in what looks like a progressive chain of the strong exploiting the weak for its own benefit. This is exactly the message this animal proverb aims to teach mankind on the surface. But the underlying message has implications not only for animals but also for the power relationship among individuals, families, communities and even nations, in which the stronger lord it over the weaker.

He admitted that while he uses the proverb to condemn acts of aggression against a weaker person, others use the same proverb to justify such acts. For example, a house maid who has received a beating from her mistress may decide to retaliate on her mistresses' child by beating the child as soon as her mistress leaves the house. A neighbour who observes this behaviour may decide to condemn the action of the house maid by quoting the above proverb. The house maid on her own part may quote the proverb as a justification for her action in retaliating to the ill-treatment she received from her mistress by ill-treating the child.

Power hierarchy in the animal kingdom is also captured in another Ikwo proverb that describes the power relationship existing between the lion and the antelope:

3. *Agu bata oswa mgbada awaru oso*

Lion enters forest antelope starts run

When the lion enters the forest, the antelope takes to its heels

In explaining the above proverb, the retired school teacher who also quoted it said that the fact that the antelope takes to its heels as soon as it sights the lion in the bush is eloquent testimony that the antelope acknowledges the superiority of the lion in the jungle. This use of animal imagery is in line with Lévi-Strauss's (1963) view that in less developed cultures, reality is still categorized in terms of binary opposition using totemic objects taken from the physical environment such as the stronger lion versus the weaker antelope we see in the above proverb.

At the deeper level of meaning, the lion is symbolic of men of age, strength and achievement while the antelope is symbolic of the younger, weaker and less powerful members of society. The analogy can be extended to groups, institutions and nations, some of which are known to be more powerful than others, thus continuing the theme of unequal power relations.

Since the Ikwo society demands that age and achievement be respected, my respondent explained that the proverb is quoted frequently by prominent members of the society, himself inclusive, to remind the younger and less successful members of society to live up to this societal expectation. More importantly, he acknowledges that the proverb is sometimes used as an instrument of intimidation by the strong against the weak. Used in such manner, the aim is to cow the weak into submitting to the wishes or demands of the strong.

Many Ikwo proverbs use images of domestic and wild animals that occur naturally in the society to draw lessons learnt by closely observing the lifestyles of such animals. One of the most frequently used domestic animals in Ikwo proverbs is the chicken. This is also the case with the Igbo as we see in Nwonwu (2014) in which Igbo proverbs that employ the chicken metaphor are examined in descriptive details. One Ikwo proverb that draws a lesson from the lifestyle of the chicken is:

4. *Oku haa kwoo, yo gide ngunu zua unwu iya?*

Hen leaves clucking, it uses what (to) train young its?

If the hen abandons clucking, how can it feed its chicks?

The proverb according to a rural-dwelling, non-literate elderly female respondent uses the chicken imagery to drive home the lesson on diligence, hard work and commitment as can be learnt by closely observing the chicken. According to him, the chicken is known to cluck continuously when it takes out its young chicks in search of food. This process is perhaps, necessary to scare other hens from the source of food, to attract its chicks to the source of food and advise them on how best to consume the food without being choked in the process etc. This obviously is hard work for the hen and must demand due diligence and commitment to carry through. Nevertheless, the hen never relents because the survival of her off-spring depends on her maintaining the momentum of the clucking noise. According to Nwonwu (ibid, p. 20): "The unrelenting chattering of the hen while taking care of its chicks is considered a *sine qua non* for effective feeding of the younger chick."

The chicken is therefore, symbolic of the care taker while the chicks are symbolic of the recipients of care. One important lesson to learn from this animal is commitment to one's duty or responsibility of care. In this case the hen is committed enough not to abandon its duty of care no matter how difficult it is to fulfil that duty.

She said she uses the proverb to encourage herself in the difficult responsibility of training up her children since the death of her husband. The proverb may also be quoted to condemn any attempt to shirk one's responsibilities with the excuse that it is difficult to meet such responsibility. In the people's opinion, there is no reason good enough to abandon one's duty of care to others simply because the duty or responsibility is taxing. Either way the proverb aims to encourage those engaged in the duty of care not to relent.

Also from the chicken, the Ikwo society seem to draw another important lesson as we see in:

5. *Oku chita okpa labu voo ali onu egvua ya l'ali*

Hen carry legs two scratch ground mouth hits it on ground

If the hen scratches the soil with two legs (at the same time) its beak will hit the ground

This proverb is also based on the close observation of the feeding habit of the chicken, which according to a non-literate middle-aged man shows that it scratches the soil to reveal food sources such as earthworms hidden in the soil. In doing so it is careful to use one leg after the other, never the two together; otherwise it will lose balance and land on and break its beak. This would be a painful and humiliating experience for the chicken, one that a clever chicken will be careful to avoid. This is what the proverb aims to teach on the surface.

But the underlying lesson of the proverb, according to him is the lesson it teaches on doing things one at a time to avoid taking on more tasks than one can perform at a time. The chicken's action of scratching with both legs is thus symbolic of taking on too many activities that can weigh one down, while the breaking of its beak is symbolic of the painful consequences of such actions. He recalled quoting the proverb to his wife who wanted to combine full-time work with full-time studies, that the demands of the two will stretch her beyond her limits. With the proverb, he convinced her to take part-time studies while on full-time work.

From two sets of animals used in Ikwo proverbs the people seem to draw two sets of lessons: one on solidarity and the other on antagonism. The ram and the sheep are members of a kin from whom the people draw the lesson of the importance of kin solidarity as we see in:

6. *Egbugbu egbu ebila t'adujedu aturu mma l'obu*

Killing killed ram not be sheep good in heart

The killing of the ram is never pleasing to the sheep

The 58-year-old non-literate male butcher who quoted the above proverb explained that after a keen observation of the reaction of the sheep each time a ram is being slaughtered, some Ikwo observers may have noted that whenever the ram is placed in the slaughter table, the sheep goes on rampage to demonstrate its displeasure with humans. This demonstration of solidarity must have struck a positive note on the psyche of humans to realize that it is a quality worth emulating as a group, and a community survival strategy. The lesson seems to be that if one member of a group is in trouble, the other members of that group should rally round to his rescue or defence, instead of looking the other way for lack of concern. This lesson is driven home by a Swahili proverb: "If a snake bites your neighbour, you too are in danger" (Mieder, 2004, p. 89). The opposite lesson is one that is drawn from two other animals which are even more closely related than the first two, but which can hardly co-exist side by side

each other. The vipers are so antagonistic to each other that two of them cannot live in one hole as conveyed by the proverb:

7. *Oghu t'adujedu ebo l'enu lanu*
Vipers not be two in hole one
Two vipers do not live in one hole

While proverb 6 teaches a positive lesson, proverb 7 teaches a negative one. The vipers that do not inhabit one hole are symbolic of humans that do not get along with others, even with members of the same family. The consequence is that they can easily be overcome by adversaries in the same way that the vipers have almost been hunted out of extinction, owing to their solitary way of life. The same sense of mutual antagonism is conveyed by two African (Ghanaian) proverbs "Two cocks do not crow from the same roof" (Anang) and "Two crocodiles do not live in one hole (Ga)" (Mieder, 2004, p. 88) and one Russian proverb: "Two bears do not live together in one den" (ibid, p. 97). Their attitudes are akin to those of the two captains who cannot be in one ship, and is a commentary on how two people who claim equality with each other find it difficult to work together because none would take orders from the other.

My respondent said he quoted Proverb 6 to justify the action of his son who fought in defence of his mother, involved in a fight with another woman. When the boy was blamed for involvement in a fight that was not his, he quoted the proverb to convince his accusers that a fight against a child's mother is as good as a fight against the child in question, in view of the bond of love existing between the child and his mother. Thus, the deeper lesson of the proverb is on the need for solidarity among members of the same family, religion, nationality etc. On the other hand, proverb 7 may be quoted in condemnation of mutual antagonism among members of a kin.

Another Ikwo proverb that draws an important lesson on kinship from the animal world is:

8. *Agu t'egbudu ogbo*
Lion not kill namesake
The lion does not kill its own kind

This proverb which derives from a close observation of nature means that even though the lion is a danger to other animals in the jungle, it does not pose such danger to fellow lions. A 28-year old female respondent who is a nurse explained that this is because the lions respect the bond of relationship existing among them as members of a kin. As such, they unite to hunt other animals while preserving their members. The cultural lesson to be drawn from this is that people should respect the blood ties that exist among them by avoiding any acts of aggression towards each other. If animals could respect this blood tie, how much more humans. Man, thus learns this very important lesson on the respect for the sanctity of the life of fellow humans from the lion. The lesson of the proverb, thus looks beyond the lion to apply to all humans not to use their energies to fight against each other, but rather to channel such energies to defeat their common enemies such as hunger, poverty, disease, and other natural disasters confronting him.

She recounts quoting the proverb in the settlement of misunderstandings among people, especially those who are blood relations, urging them to remember that the blood relationship

existing between them forbids violence against each other in the Ikwo culture. The proverb may also be quoted to remind people who are inclined to committing acts of violence against others of the kin relationship that exists among all humans; and which forbids the shedding of a fellow human's blood. Such a person or persons are directed to learn their lesson from the lion by quoting the above proverb. Used in this way, the proverb could lead to calming of nerves and a peaceful settlement of the issues that gave rise to the conflict situation in the first place.

The belief that God can defend the defenceless is given credence in the proverb:

9. *Eswi t'enwedu odzu bu chi ya egbujeru iya ijiji*

Cow not have tail is god its drives it flies

The cow without tail its god drives the flies away for it

An elderly, non-literate male respondent explained that the tailless cow in the above proverb is symbolic of the poor, the powerless, and the disabled members of society who, ordinarily are unable to meet their individual needs, but who are still able to survive from day to day. The flies that need driving away are symbolic of the numerous problems that confront man on day to day basis, while the personal god of the cow is symbolic of the source of help. Thus, the proverb seeks to offer hope to man that in the face of his numerous problems, help is always available from God. In other words, the proverb offers the assurance of divine intervention in the affairs of man.

Though it uses images from nature to make its point at the surface level, the proverb's underlying message is used to give hope to the hopeless in times of difficulties. For example, this respondent used the proverb during a condolence visit to a family that lost their breadwinner in a vehicle accident. He urged them to take solace in the words of the above proverb.

However, such assurances of help should not be stretched too far as we see in the next proverb:

10. *Oke eswi edzudu o radu l'egbudu radu iya, agu afoo ya*

Male cow unfit to sleep in (the) bush sleeps there, lion devours it

If the male cow sleeps in the bush prematurely, the lion will devour it

The above proverb serves to remind people of the dangers of taking unnecessary risk especially based on a false or bloated assessment of one's abilities. An 80-year-old non-literate rural dweller and hunter who quoted the proverb explained that in the jungle, the lion is regarded as the king. However, it is not unusual for some animals to want to challenge the authority of the lion. A full-grown male cow may be pushed by its huge size to think that it is strong enough to challenge the lion by sleeping in the open jungle, away from the protection afforded by its human owner in the stable. The danger in such a move is that if the cow is not strong enough, it is likely to be devoured by the lion. Three factors may count against the cow and in favour of the lion. First, the lion is naturally stronger than the cow; second, the lion knows the terrain of the jungle more than the cow; third the lion will have the support of other lions during the encounter with the cow. It is thus foolhardy for the cow to challenge the lion in its own natural habitat and hope to come out alive. The above is the surface meaning of the proverb.

At the deep level, the proverb highlights the dangers of venturing out of one's comfort zone to take unnecessary risks, and may thus be quoted to discourage such by humans. It aims to discourage people from taking avoidable risks for which they are ill-prepared or ill-equipped, and for which the timing is wrong because of the disastrous consequences that may follow. This respondent recalled quoting the proverb to one of his sons who despite his youth and inexperience, challenged the village wrestling champion to a wrestling contest. Though he was huge in stature, he was much younger than the village wrestler, and lacked the necessary experience in wrestling. In the process, he was so violently thrown that he broke his waist. When this respondent went to visit him at the local bonesetter's house he reminded him of his folly with the above proverb.

Humans can learn humility from animals as we see in the next Ikwo proverb about the relationship between the lamb and its mother:

11. *Nwankpi furu efuru yo nguta nne iya era*

Lamb squats down it sucks mother it breast

If the lamb stoops down it sucks its mother's breast

Another elderly village male farmer of about 86 years of age explained that from a close observation of the relationship between the lamb and its mother, the Ikwo people may have learnt that the key to getting what one wants from one's superior is to humble oneself as we see from the posture taken by the lamb whenever it sucks its mother's breasts. This is indicated by the stooping posture of the lamb. The lamb is symbolic of someone in need of a favour. Its mother's breast is symbolic of the favour while its mother is symbolic of the source. The act of stooping down is symbolic of the humility, which is the passport to obtaining the favour.

The proverb is thus a lesson on humility to humans, and is used to remind people who are arrogant to learn from the lamb that without humility it will be difficult to get even those favours they think they are entitled to, just as it is not in doubt whether the lamb is entitled to its mother's breast or not. The issue is how to easily access what you think you are entitled to without running into difficulty with the provider. My respondent told me that he quoted the proverb to a politician who was having problems with his political god-father, and who came to him for advice. In using the proverb to begin his speech he could convince the politician of the truth of his advice because it had its basis on traditional wisdom.

The lesson that human desires can be curtailed by the limitations imposed on him by nature can be drawn from the Ikwo proverb about the lizard:

12. *Etsukfuru agu ngwere male odzu iya tekwedu*

Squatting hungers lizard but tail its refuses

The lizard wishes to squat down but its tail would not allow it

The proverb means that though the lizard can run fast on its belly, it is unable to either squat or sit up because it is constrained by its long tail to a life on its belly most of the time. The 46-year old secondary school teacher who quoted this proverb explained that the tail becomes the natural impediment to the realization of a desire by the lizard. Similarly, humans have natural impediments that prevent them from realizing their desires. The lizard proverb thus reminds humans that they are not alone in the curtailment of their desires by nature. The

lesson from the lizard is that such natural handicaps to realizing our desires should be borne in much the same way as the lizard is bearing its own handicap.

The proverb can be used both to blame and absolve an individual of blame when he fails to achieve set target or live up to societal expectations. For example, an individual can quote the proverb to excuse or justify one's inability to achieve set target or meet societal expectations. But a critic can quote the same proverb to blame another's inability to meet set target as due to failings in the person's personal character. In either case the proverb's significance lies in reminding people that they cannot live above the limits imposed on them by nature, and as such must live within and with such limitations. My respondent told me he likes to use it not as critics do, but sympathetically to pardon people for failings that are not of their own making. For example, he recalled using it to sympathise with one of his teachers who desired to buy a car, but all that his salary could fetch him was a motor cycle.

The trees also have lessons to teach humanity as we note in the Ikwo proverb:

13. *Oshi lanu t'emejedu oswa*

Tree one not makes forest

One tree does not make a forest

The proverb means that it takes a cluster of many trees, big and small, short and long etc. to create a forest (a communal habitation for wild animals). No one tree, no matter how big or tall it is can provide enough shelter for all the animals in the bush. This according to a village hunter of about 45 years of age is the surface meaning conveyed by the above imagery. However, the underlying meaning is that in a traditional society where everyone contributes towards the smooth function of society, no one person can claim to be able to perform all the duties of other members of society, as every member has an important role to play. Nor can anyone claim to be more important than others. Any such claim is countered by the above proverb.

The proverb aims to drive home the supremacy of the group over the individual, no matter how highly placed in a communal society, and may be quoted to anyone who tends to place himself and his personal interests above those of the wider society, to subsume such interests within those of others. Thus, it discourages the pursuit of personal interests above communal ones. My respondent recalls that their community used this proverb to defeat the position of a prominent man from their village who wanted his opinion to prevail over those of the majority on the location of a proposed development project.

Apart from plants and animals, the Ikwo society learn lessons from other elements in nature, such as water, fire, wind etc. For example, even though water is very useful to man and harmless if properly handled, it is a potential source of danger if abused or misused. We learn this much from the proverb:

14. *Onye mini phuru okpa iya be o ri*

Person water sees leg his is it drowns

The river drowns him whose leg it sees

According to a 50-year-old village woman who lives in one of the riverine communities of Ikwo, and whose source of water for domestic use is the Ebonyi River, care is needed to fetch water

safely from the river, depending on its tide. In the above proverb, water is symbolic of any good thing in nature, including human beings, but which are potentially dangerous if misused or abused. The leg that approaches the river is symbolic of the provocation that can ignite such disaster. And drowning is symbolic of the disaster that might follow, to avoid which the leg must approach with caution, not necessarily avoid the river completely. So, to avoid the disaster every leg should approach the river with care.

So much for the literary meaning of the proverb. At the figurative level, the proverb is a metaphor for the exercise of wisdom in handling situations in life that are potential sources of danger. In real life, sources of trouble abound all around us. However, if we are careful enough to avoid them, we are likely to remain safe.

The proverb is quoted to warn trouble makers to keep away from danger. The proverb seeks to lay the blame for all the troubles that individuals go through in life on such individuals. It gives the impression that sources of trouble are usually dormant, and only befall individuals who fail to observe safety limits. On the other hand, the proverb can be quoted to praise or justify those who avoid taking unnecessary risks, in obvious celebration of the benefits of such behaviour. My Respondent was approached to collect loans meant to help rural women in their agriculture. She declined to take the loan. When those who collected the loan, but failed to pay back were either imprisoned or had their property and crop confiscated, she recalled praising herself for her wisdom in rejecting the loan by quoting the above proverb.

The cold dry wind that brings the harmattan season in Nigeria is another natural phenomenon from which a very important lesson can be drawn. The proverb based on this phenomenon states that:

15. *Onye t'arachadu onu iya uguru arachaaaru iya ya*

Person not leak mouth his, harmattan leaks (for) him it

If you do not lick your lips the harmattan will lick it for you

The season in question is usually marked by very cold and dry winds that bring with them coldness comparable to winter in Europe and a dryness that cracks the skin if not constantly kept moist. The part of the body mostly affected by this dryness is the mouth, which must be kept moist by constant licking. It goes without saying that failure to constantly moisten the lips with saliva (licking the lips) results in the very painful experience of having cracked lips.

According to a non-literate 20-year-old male respondent who admits that he suffers cracked lips every year, the licking of the lips is symbolic of the duty that must be done, while the cracking of the lips by the harmattan is symbolic of the immediate consequences of negligence of such duty. The harmattan itself assumes the role of the teacher who teaches the bitter lesson.

So, the proverb is a metaphor for the need to be alive to one's responsibilities, or face the consequences of the neglect of such responsibilities and may be quoted to blame the negligent or to praise the diligent. In the former case, the proverb will be used to lay blame on anyone seen to be suffering the consequences he brought on himself through inactivity, while in the latter it will be used to praise someone who has averted such consequences by being proactive.

The cold weather also serves to remind people of the need to always accord kinship ties the priority of place it deserves in the Ikwo society through the proverb:

16. *Oyi tsuta eka ya le ukuvu aburu nwune*

Cold catch hand him and shoulders become brothers

When it turns cold the hand and shoulders become brothers

In the Ikwo culture, many people according to a 68-year-old elderly female respondent, believe that the hands and the shoulders are by nature brothers. But the hand often forgets this fact by constantly keeping a long distance from the shoulders. It only takes the cold to remind the hand of this close relationship, because then, the hand quickly embraces the shoulders for warmth. It is then that this proverb comes handy to criticize the hand for having kept away from the shoulder for so long, only to be reminded of its value by adverse circumstances.

At the figurative level, according to her, the proverb is a critique of the neglect of kinship ties, and how difficulties serve to bring kith and kin together. It may be quoted by an aggrieved relation who is angry that he is only remembered by his kin when they are in trouble and come for his assistance. At other times, he is hardly remembered by his kin who fail to cater to his own needs. The proverb seeks to make the point that kinship ties should be valued and celebrated by constantly keeping in touch with members of one's family, and not wait for difficulties to bring family and friends together. She recalled quoting the proverb to her brother who forgot her while he was doing well in business, only to come to her for support when his business failed.

When I cornered the respondent, who quoted the above proverb on her perception of nature, she had the following to say:

Researcher: Many Ikwo proverbs use the names of the plants, animals and things that happen around you, why is this so?

Respondent: This so because if you look around you will see that God has provided us with hills, valleys, rivers, forests, domestic and wild animals to make us happy. All we need to do is look closely to understand how everything works and how to derive maximum benefit from God's abundant provisions for us. When we obey natural laws, we get positive results and we think that nature is a friend. But when we disobey natural laws we get negative results and we view nature as our enemy.

Researcher: Can you name instances when nature is a friend or foe?

Respondent: Let me use the example of the planting season to answer this question. If you plant your crops on a good soil at the right time and care for it adequately, the rains will water it, the crops will germinate and grow while the sun will help it to bear fruits. The harvest will be plenty and you will see nature as a friend. At other times, you may take all the above steps but due to drought or other natural disasters the yield will be poor resulting in famine. At such times, nature will be perceived as a foe. In all circumstances our proverbs tell us to learn from our immediate environment and understand our limitations as humans.

(Mgbebu, 68, f, u)

I asked the traditional ruler of Igbudu community for the reason behind the above perception of nature by the Ikwo people:

In the absence of schools our people relied on what they saw and perceived around them to make sense of this great universe created by God. And if you observe closely you will learn something from the animals, the birds, the trees and other things created by God. Do you know that you can learn how to fight for your children from the hen? You can learn how to feed your children from the birds. You can learn hardwork from the ants etc. Nature uses these things to teach us how to live in this world without going to school. We make mistakes and suffer the consequences only when we fail to obey natural laws¹².

Findings

The key question here is whether nature is a friend or foe to man. Since 14 of the proverbs analysed representing 87.5% view nature as a friend while 2 proverbs representing 12.5% view nature as a foe to man, it is safe to say that more Ikwo proverbs perceive nature as friendly to man. Similar studies came to similar conclusions as we see from Klein's (2000) study from New Zealand, Fanany's (2000) study from Indonesia and Opata's (1990) study on the Igbo.

4.10. Identifying the liminal category

Having identified proverbs that represent the opposing views in all categories analysed, I decided to interview more people, especially the younger, western educated men and women who are also predominantly urban dwellers to find out if they could come up with proverbs or proverb-like expressions that could bridge the gap created by the opposing views. First, I explained to them the opposing views on the issues raised in each category and the proverbs that represented such views. Then, I asked them for their own views on the issues raised in each category. Finally, I asked them to give me a proverb that captured vividly their view on such issues. Their proverbs and proverb-like expressions are explained in the discussion chapter.

From the category of Life and Living, the following expressions emerged:

1. *Onye vu igu be egbu e etso* (Philip, 38, m, e)
Person carrying (palm) leaves is goat will follow
The goat follows whoever is carrying fresh palm leaves.
2. *Onye mekotaru ehu iya ekwe ndawerere* (Mary, 30, f, e)
Person organize body his echoes chorus
He who has achieved personal success joins the (communal) chorus.

These two proverbs suggest that in Philip's opinion, neither communalism nor individualism can put food on the table of a lazy man. According to him, irrespective of the system in use what matters is hardwork, which leads to success. Success attracts followership (proverb 1) and communal admiration (proverb 2)

From the category of Death and the Great Beyond the following expression emerged:

1. *Iphe onye kwetaru e jeru iya ozhi* (Patrick, 40, m, e)

Thing person believes it goes him message
Whatever one believes in works for him/her.

Patrick's proverb-like expression suggests that the controversy over who controls man's destiny is resolved by holding fast to what one believes; that whatever one believes strongly in works for him, whether one believes in the gods or in oneself.

From the category of Gender Relations, the following expression emerged:

1. *Iphe nwoke e eme be nwanyi e eme yiya jara* (Felicia, 28, m, e)
Thing man can do is woman can do add extra
What a man can do a woman can do better.

Felicia's proverb-like expression reflects her belief in the equality of both sexes, and the ability of anyone to excel irrespective of sex. According to her no sex is inherently weak or strong; strength is according to other personal circumstances unrelated to sex.

From the category of The Aged in Society comes such expression as:

1. *Ka I ma nke a, I ma nke ozo?* (Ozo, 33, m, e)
As you know this one, you know the other?
No one knows it all.

Ozo's expression suggests that neither the elders nor the youths have monopoly of knowledge and the respect that comes with it. According to an Igbo adage, knowledge is like a hand bag; everyone carries his own either on the right hand or on the left hand. So, no one has monopoly of knowledge.

From the category of Children and Youths I got the following:

1. *A zua nwa nwa azua onye odo* (Tessy, 35, f, e)
One train child child train person other
If a child is trained the child will train another.

Here, the controversy of whether the child is an asset or liability does not matter for Tessy. What matters is the upbringing given to a child. A well trained and supported child will no doubt be an asset to society while an untrained and unloved child will turn out to be a thorn in the flesh of society.

From the category of Man and Nature came the expression:

1. *Ege i meru ali be ali e me ngu* (Nwaka, 40, f, e)
As you do land is land will do you
What you give to nature determines what you get back from it.

In the opinion of Nwaka, nature gives to man what man gives to it. As such, if man treats nature kindly, nature will treat him kindly and vice versa. According to him the issue of whether nature is friend or foe to us depends on us.

The result of my interviews is the emergence of the above consensus-oriented proverbs and "proverb-like" (Mieder, 2004, p. 5) expressions, some of which cannot be said to be full fledged proverbs because they fail the "traditionality" (ibid) requirement of expressions that can be called proverbs. However, their significance lies in the fact that they belong to the category of expressions that express the liminal category of view contributed to Levi-Strauss's

structuralism by Leach (1964) and they represent an attempt to resolve the conflict generated by the opposing views identified in chapter four. Thus, they represent the product of the dynamic process through which new proverbs and worldviews evolve, akin to the dialogic process by which the traditional proverbs and worldviews evolve (Bakhtin, 1981; Foley, 1997).

Their proverbs and proverb-like expressions suggest that in their opinion the answer to conflicts of opinions does not lie on either side of the opposition. In their opinion, the answer lies in the middle, a space where compromise is struck, where give and take results in a common ground of agreement and resolution of conflicts. This is the same point that apparently contradictory proverbs make when they stand side by side. They seem to urge humans to steer the middle course and apply moderation in all things. By providing this common ground approach to resolving conflicts generated by opposing views, these young people seem to be applying the traditional wisdom of proverbs in conflict resolution, hence the need to preserve them together with the languages and cultures in which they are expressed.

By identifying the group and the expressions that represent their views, this study has contributed to the creation of new knowledge by identifying the liminal space that has been marginalized, and therefore not been acknowledged in contemporary Igbo or other research. The implication is that if a safe space is created for the critical interrogation of these “new” expressions together with the “traditional” Ikwo proverb repertoire in a school programme, more of such consensus-oriented expressions might be created, hence the need for critical interrogation of proverb knowledge and potentially a certain focus on consensus-oriented proverbs in contemporary teaching programmes. This leads us to last research question of why and how Ikwo proverbs should be taught in contemporary school curricula. I shall try to provide answers to the question during the discussion and conclusion in chapter five.

Summary of findings

The analysis in this chapter found that most Ikwo proverbs supported communalism and the view that the gods controlled man’s destiny. On the issue of gender, most proverbs framed women as weak, while many proverbs support the perspective that the male elders deserved the respect they got. Similarly, on the issue of children and youth most proverbs presented them as assets, and on the issue of whether nature was a friend or foe to man, most portrayed nature as friend.

The above finding answers the first research questions of this study. It could be argued that such binary views polarize the Ikwo society along two parallel and opposing ideological lines, which is in line with Levi-Strauss’s (1963) theory that human thoughts are organized in binaries of opposing views giving rise to his meaning-in-opposition view that the meaning of all social phenomena can only be understood in relation to other phenomena to which they are opposed.

The analysis also found that the Ikwo proverb space was dominated by the predominantly elderly male, non-literate rural dwellers, who used proverbs to perpetrate and perpetuate their hierarchical dominance over the weaker members of the society such as women and children. As such, many Ikwo proverbs and the worldviews they expressed reflected the views of this group. This finding answers the second research question. Of course, the interest of a few elderly folks cannot be said to represent the interests of all social groups in Ikwo society. But

this finding confirms the findings of other researches on the issue of dominance of proverb discourse by a section of society.

The above findings are in line with contemporary research on Igbo proverbs. The point of departure between this study and other studies on the Igbo before it is the identification of the liminal space which no previous study on the Igbo or any other cultural group had identified, hence its major contribution to knowledge. This analysis identified the liminal space occupied by the category of people whose interests were neglected in the Ikwo proverb repertoire - the younger, western educated men and women who are also predominantly urban dwellers. They are the borderline, peripheral members of the society who are marginalized in the Ikwo proverb space. As such their worldviews and interests cannot be said to be protected. This study also identified a few consensus-oriented, proverb-like expressions which represent their views, which I consider to be the major achievement of this study, and therefore, its contribution to knowledge.

Endnotes

1. A wellerism is a sub-genre of the proverb replete with humour, irony and satire used to provide comic relief from conventional proverbs in much the same way as tall tales are used to provide comic relief from folk narratives (Mieder, 2004). It uses human or animal characters to make statements which twist the wisdom of conventional proverbs to create pun and fun. Examples include: "Business before pleasure," as the man said when he kissed his wife before he went out to make love to his neighbour's; and "All flesh is grass," as the horse said when he bit a piece out of a man's arm (ibid, p. 15)
2. These scholars highlighted the need for the analysis of proverbs as performance (speech acts) and in relation to the cultural context in which they are used by a researcher who understands the language and culture he is studying. This is because as Seitel contends, "An investigator who observes proverb usage in a natural conversational setting and in his own language will define [analyse] proverb differently from an investigator whose data are collections of texts" (ibid, p. 124). Seitel's view that an indigenous investigator is more suited to achieve set target in proverb analysis is echoed by Dabaghi *et al* (2010, p. 813) who wrote: "The translator should know the linguistic and non-linguistic features of both languages... because a proverb should be rendered with care to carry the same cultural conventions in the original proverb." Furthermore, as Firth argues: "The meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given a full account of the accompanying social situation, – the reason for its use, its effect, and its significance in speech" (Firth, 1926a, p. 134).
3. The proverb data presented in the tables were divided into six categories and abbreviated for ease of reference as follows: LL means proverbs of life and living; DB means proverbs of death and the great beyond; GR means proverbs of gender relations; AS means proverbs of the aged in society; CY means proverbs of children and youth; MN means proverbs of man and nature.
4. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the three majority languages and cultures spoken and practised in Nigeria. The Hausa live predominantly in the Northeast and Northwest, the Igbo in the Southeast and the Yoruba in the Southwest. Though the three groups have different historical origins as well as different languages and cultures, there still exist some overlap in cultural practices, especially in matters relating to proverb use by women and children.

Though many studies have been carried out on Nigerian proverbs (Messenger, 1959; Arewa and Dundes, 1964; Ojoade, 1983; Asayinbola, 2007; Abdullahi and Abdulkarim, 2015 etc.), studies on the Igbo are very important to this study because Ikwo is a subgroup of the Igbo with whom they share a common origins and ancestry (Eze, 2011). Their language and culture is among the 30 variants of the Igbo language and culture (Lewis et al, 2013). Because of this linguistic and cultural affinity, it will not be surprising to find close similarities in worldviews among the two groups conveyed in their proverbs. Such studies on Igbo proverbs include Pensfield (1981), Nwachukwu-Agbada (1988; 1989; 1993; 1994; 1997), Oha (1998), Nwonwu (2014).

However, not all the studies mentioned above can be said to be scholarly analyses of the proverbs of the cultures they set out to analyse. This is because some of their analyses lacked clear methodological approaches or theoretical underpinnings. As such they were mere descriptive accounts of the cultural reflections of the culture in their proverbs. This is the case with the work of Nwonwu. Others who had clear methodological approaches and underlying theories for their analyses only undertook thematic analysis of one restricted category of proverbs or the other. This is the case with the other scholars. Unfortunately, no similar analyses of Ikwo proverbs have ever been undertaken, hence this study.

5. From China, Lee's (2015) study showed that most Chinese proverbs represented women in a negative light as a reflection of gender inequality perpetuated by men through proverbs, while Storm's (1992) study which investigated contemporary Japanese attitudes towards women as mirrored in the proverbs also found that women were often the target of derogatory proverbs. "While there are more proverbs about women than there are about men in Japan (1:0.38) the few proverbs about men are mostly complimentary" (p. 173).
6. Interview with the traditional ruler of Echara Autonomous Community on 5th October 2014.
7. Based on the Greek classic, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Ola Rotimi's (1974) play features Odewale, the central character who at birth is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Every step taken to prevent that from happening led exactly to the destined end of Odewale killing his father and marrying his mother.
8. Interview with the traditional ruler of Amagu Autonomous Community on 12th October 2014.
9. Interview with the traditional ruler of Alike Autonomous Community on 19th October 2014.
10. Interview with the traditional ruler of Unweka Autonomous Community on 26th October 2014
11. Interview with the traditional ruler of Ekpomaka Autonomous Community on 2nd November 2014.
12. Interview with the traditional ruler of igbudu Autonomous community on 9th November 2014.

Chapter Five

Discussion and conclusions

This study set out to answer the following research questions: a. which worldviews are expressed in Ikwo proverbs; b. whether such worldviews represent the interest of all social groups; and c. why and how Ikwo proverbs should be taught in contemporary school curricula. The first two questions were answered in chapter four. In addition, the chapter identified the liminal space and a few consensus-oriented proverbs and proverb-like expressions which represent its contribution to knowledge around proverb analysis.

This chapter will discuss the findings of chapter four – opposing views of proverbs and proverb categories in the light of Lévi-Strauss's ideas as well as consensus-oriented proverbs that represent the liminal category of view contributed to Lévi-Strauss' structuralism by Leach (1964). A programme of education as a space for the critical interrogation of Ikwo proverb view/knowledge and its potential for saving the language and culture from extinction will also be discussed to address the third research question.

5.1. Opposing views of proverb categories and proverbs

This subsection will discuss the opposing views of proverbs and proverb categories as confirmation of Lévi-Strauss's view that human thoughts work by the rule of binaries and opposites. For example, in the category of Life and the Living a conflict is set up between two socio-economic systems – communalism and individualism. In this category, we find evidence of a struggle between the predominantly rural Ikwo society with an extended family system which favours communalism as their preferred socio-economic system on the one hand, and an emerging educated elite living in the urban area with their small-sized nuclear families for whom individualism is the preferred mode.

Studies show that communalism is not only endorsed in the Ikwo society, but is also a system held in high esteem in other societies and cultures across the world. These include societies in Nigeria (Moemeka, 1998), in Senegal (Gleason, 2003), in South Africa (Kanwangamalu, 1999), as well as in Asia (Zeffane, 2014).

Communalism corresponds with Emile Durkheim's (1976) concept of mechanic solidarity in his theory of social production of culture, a practice by which traditional societies are held together by their shared beliefs and understandings which constitute their collective consciousness. It is this collective consciousness that governed their thoughts, attitudes and practices. Communalism is valued in most communities in Africa because it emphasizes the value of mutual aid and interdependence as a necessary condition for the welfare not only of the community, but also of the individual.

Specifically, communalism is a value which encourages individual, family and community cohesion by insisting on the importance of collective solidarity and interdependence through a collective consciousness whereby the self is perceived in relation to the perception of others, not as independent of one another, but as interdependent of one another. It places a lot of emphasis on "dignity, respect, conformity and reconciliation during conflict and hardship" (ibid, p.24) as a way of sustaining the peace and harmony in society.

It is a value according to which the interest of the individual is subordinate to that of the group. In other words, the group constitutes the focus of the activities of the

individual members of the society at large. Communalism insists that the good of all determines the good of each or, put differently, the welfare of each is dependent on the welfare of all.... Traditional African values foster a communalistic world-view towards life.... Nobody in an African context lives for himself. We live for the community... an individual cannot imagine organizing his life outside that of his family, village or clan (ibid).

Studies carried out in different societies that adopt different cultural approaches in the production of goods and services show that different methods work better for different cultures. For example, Kanwangamalu's (1999) analysis of the concept of Ubuntu as a cultural concept reflected in South African proverbs found that the collectivist spirit engendered by communalism fostered healthy work relationships among South Africans, thus enhancing economic production and the general wellbeing of its citizens. As a result, he argues that "extreme individualism could not thrive in traditional African culture; and that despite individual talents and capacities, the individual ought to be aware of his or her insufficiency to achieve his or her welfare through solitary effort." (ibid, p. 25). Even in contemporary Africa, this statement remains true to a large extent.

In a similar study carried out among the Senegalese, Gleason's (2003) study of individualism and collectivism as cultural models of production in rural Senegal found that collectivism drives development faster in Africa than individualism. This is because the collectivist model motivates target groups such as women in rural areas (who are the economic drivers in such communities) not the Western individualistic model. In fact, to such women individualism is an entirely alien concept and will not work if it were imposed on them.

From the Middle East and the gulf region, where collectivist aspirations are predominant, Zeffane's (2014) study found that people who have personal traits of predominantly collectivist nature were found to have great potentials as entrepreneurs. The study does not support the assumption that individualism and entrepreneurship ties go hand in hand, rather collectivism plays a greater role. The fact that the economy of the countries in these regions have been boosted by an increasing number of advanced and quite daring entrepreneurial projects is evidence of the collectivist spirit at work, while the vast business growths and opportunities in China, Japan, Dubai, Qatar and Abu Dhabi are there for all to see.

But critics of communalism may argue that the system undermines self-reliance and damages the self-confidence of the individual, leading to under achievement and dependency on others. It may also be accused of undermining individual rights and freedoms in its pursuit of group or community interests. Above all, it has been accused of standing in the way of economic progress by suppressing the development of individual talents and the pursuit of individual dreams (Raffinot and Venet, 2011; Zeffane, 2014). As such the system is often regarded as backward looking and unprogressive, relying for its success on a traditional social structure which is fast giving way in a modern era characterised by urbanization with its resultant severing of traditional social ties. As a result, the system is unsustainable in the modern age. One such critic is Falola (2003) who wrote: "While analysts are correct about the merits and relevance of group identity, it remains unclear how elements of the past can be duplicated in a competitive modern economy" (p. 217).

The traditional Ikwo society which favoured communalism as a socio-economic system of agricultural production was typically a rural, agrarian society with high level of illiteracy. Agriculture was not mechanized, and was therefore, labour intensive. Labour was manual and

implements were often crude – consisting of locally made hoes and machetes. Land for agriculture was communally owned, but shared among individuals at the beginning of each farming season for small-scale farming. Eze (2011, p. 457) characterized the system of agricultural production as follows:

The labour was mostly by mutual aids where each group farmed for each other in rotation. Both men and women joined mutual aid groups for farming work. This included cutting of grasses and weeding by women and hoeing mostly by men. A big farmer was known by how large his farm was and richness was measured by how many big farm crops and stock of domestic animals one could boast of. The number of wives and children a farmer had also helped to beef up his farming, since they all constituted more labour for the farms.

The system worked in the traditional Ikwo society when it was still a predominantly rural and agrarian society whose economy revolved around agriculture. In the absence of literacy, agricultural mechanization, specialization and division of labour as we know it today, the system relied on a large pool of labour force to provide the manual labour needed on the farms. One way of providing this was to marry many wives and bear many children, and thus form a family labour group. The other was for people of the same age group, sex or social orientation to form labour groups and perform agricultural work for its members in turns as we saw in the Ikwo case above. Thus, communalism was a direct offshoot of the agricultural economy of the traditional Ikwo society, which served to supply the labour force needed to sustain the economy.

Today, things have changed with the advent of modernity with its attendant globalization, urbanization, improved literacy and access to paid employment as well as mechanized agriculture. The economy has moved from being rural-based to urban-based, from group or community-based to individual-based, while agriculture has moved from being subsistence to being commercial. Education and urbanization have led to the production of professionals who migrate to the urban centres as civil servants, lawyers, doctors, engineers, accountants, architects etc., thus separating them from the rural ties that existed in their communities and setting them free to pursue individual paths of growth and prosperity. They often earn incomes that are higher than those of their rural communities put together, thus challenging the notion that the individual cannot be stronger than the group.

Industrialization and commercialization of agriculture as well as division of labour have led to a boom in agricultural production, and moved it from the subsistence to the commercial level. Individuals engaged in commercial agriculture can produce more food than the entire village or community put together. Such individuals become wealthier than their communities and therefore, feel no longer bound to their communal expectations of him. This trend is observable in practical terms in the rural-urban migration witnessed across the society with its tendency to create a new breed of citizens who can bridge the rural-urban divide to emerge as semi-urban dwellers. With the benefit of education, they can mechanize their farming using less labour, have smaller families and yet earn more income. With improved living standards, such groups can be said to belong to the “borderline, liminal category, partaking of both poles of the opposition, but belonging completely to neither” (Leach, 1964, cited in Foley 1997, p. 102).

Because of all these pressures, the communal ethos has suffered considerable decline among some self-centered members of the Ikwo society. Among such people, some of the proverbs that reflected this ethos have been replaced by proverbs that tend to uphold the selfish

acquisitionist tendencies of the wealthy few such as *Onye vu igu be eghu e etso* [Person carrying (palm) leaves is goat will follow] meaning that the goat follows whoever is carrying fresh palm leaves. Another proverb that has emerged in favour of this evolving socio-economic group is *Onye mekotaru ehu iya ekwe ndawerere* [Person organize body his echoes chorus], meaning that he who has achieved personal success joins the (communal) chorus.

This proverb stresses that it is he who has, through dint of personal efforts, achieved success that can stand up to be counted in the comity of the important members of the society. While it recognises the importance of identifying with the group, it equally emphasises that it is more important to achieve personal success to enhance one's acceptability and recognition in the society. Such proverbs that emphasize positive paradigm shifts fall in the category of consensus proverbs which express consensus worldviews.

In the category of Death and the Great Beyond, the conflict is between the two spheres of human existence – the physical sphere and the spiritual sphere. Following from Lévi-Strauss' assertion that binaries set up by human thoughts make sense only in relation to one another, it follows that the essence of our physical existence can only be understood in relation to its impact on the life we will live hereafter in the spiritual world. We need to understand the relationship between the life we live in the physical and the one to come in the spiritual to be able to know how to live in the physical in order not to jeopardize our life in the spiritual realm. If we accept that life is a continuum, and that the way we live in the physical impacts the way we live in the spiritual, we become aware that we must strike a balance in how we live in the two spheres to be truly happy.

These beliefs and the philosophies which underlie them are supported by many studies on the Igbo with whom the Ikwo share similar traditional beliefs. For example, while Okwu (1976) dwelt on the concept of the unity of creation, Okpala (2002) dwelt on the duality of human existence, in the here and in the hereafter. Their studies are complemented by Duru's (1983) study which dwelt on the Igbo belief in a supreme God, who created the physical world for humans to live in, and the spiritual world for dead ancestors to live in.

The totality of Igbo belief about the cyclic nature of life, the relationship between the living and the dead, reincarnation and the efficacy of the spirit is captured in this funeral address to the dead Ezudu before his burial by the one-handed spirit who carried a basket full of water:

Ezeudu ...if you had been poor in your last life I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been a coward I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long. So, I shall ask you to come again the way you came before. If your death was the death of nature, go in peace. But if a man caused it, do not allow him a moment's rest (Achebe, 1958, p. 86).

These beliefs put together are eloquent testimonies of the people's perception of their world – a world in which there is the harmonious coexistence of the physical and the spiritual; in which man is a member of both worlds at the same time; and a world in which a constant mutual relationship between the physical and the spiritual ensures social harmony.

Ancestor worship and the reincarnation phenomenon are not restricted to the past or to the Ikwo society alone. Recent studies show that they are still part of present day life of other parts of the world. For example, Haraldsson's (2006) and Day's (2012) studies show that the beliefs

in life after death, reincarnation and ancestor veneration (like ancestor worship) are still a common phenomenon in European and American societies.

The unquestioning acceptance of the powers of these supernatural phenomena over humans has been criticized as having many negative impacts on social wellbeing (Oyebode, 2014). For example, the belief in the overriding influence of the supernatural forces over the affairs of man denies individuals the control of their lives and leads to the prevalence of such fetish practices as ritual killing, witchcraft and other harmful practices, ostensibly in obedience to the will of one fetish god or the other. All religions set up a power relationship between humans and the supernatural through an imaginative belief in the existence of divine objects, e.g. ancestors, and equally imaginative belief in the potentials of such objects to control our lives. Such beliefs tend to take away control from us and invest it elsewhere in the realm of the supernatural. But such dominating and controlling powers of the gods and ancestors are only conjectures of the mind, and since there is no empirical evidence to validate this claim of superiority of either the gods or ancestors over us, it is high time we freed ourselves from these avoidable controls by all forces, seen and unseen.

To take control and achieve one's utmost potentials, one must recover such control and domesticate it within his reach in the physical world, and within oneself in an act of self-liberation. This act is necessary because otherwise, religious beliefs will hold us down and not allow us the liberty to pursue great enterprises. But if we wrestle the object of our faith from the supernatural to the natural e.g. belief in one's natural abilities, we see the inherent possibilities in us. This line of argument is supported by such expressions as *Iphe onye kwetaru e jeru iya ozhi* [Thing person believes it goes him message] meaning that whatever one believes in works for him/her.

In the category of gender relations, the men stand in opposition to the women. Here, the traditional patriarchal view of women as inferior to men in Africa (Falola, 2003) and elsewhere in the world (Connell, 1995) stands in opposition to the modern liberal feminism of equality of the sexes. Here again, the conflict will help bring out the best qualities in men as well as in women. Each sex is better appreciated from a better knowledge of the other. The need for consensus or balance between the two for peaceful coexistence will emerge, leading to cordial relationships between men and women.

Many scholars have argued that patriarchy as a social system in some African societies is responsible for the inferiorization of women by men, and that the men in these societies have weaved sexist proverbs as an instrument of sustaining their dominion of the women. They also argue that proverbs are used by hegemonic male folk who harbour prejudices against the womenfolk to portray them in negative stereotypes to maintain their domination and subjugation of the women in a patriarchal society (Oha, 1998; Hussein, 2004; 2005; 2009; Mmadike (2014).

A patriarchal society is one where gender roles are distinct and evident and in which women play subordinate roles to men, while the men dominate the women as heads of households and in other public spheres outside the home. "In such a system, men are regarded as the authority within the areas of society like the traditional family, clan or tribe. Powers and possessions are passed on from father to son and descent is reckoned in the male line" (Dogo, 2014, p. 264). Patriarchy is rooted in the gender ideology which perceives the male as superior and the female as inferior; and perpetuated by the hegemonic domination of women by men

in a system that portrays men as deserving of the allegiance and subservience of women, and who have the prerogative of exercising their power over women (Nzegwu, 1998; Hussein, 2004, 2005, 2009;). According to Hussein:

Gender ideology is a systematic set of cultural beliefs through which a society constructs and wields its gender relations and practices. Gender ideology contains legends, narratives and myths about what it means to be a man or a woman and suggests how each should behave in the society. A society's gender ideology is grounded largely in religious and social principles, which are then used as grounds to justify different rights, responsibilities and rewards to each gender (Hussein, 2005, pp. 59-60).

In the traditional Ikwo society, patriarchy and gender ideology which kicked in at birth and was sustained till death, influenced the socialization process, the assignment of roles and everything between (Eze, 2011). For example, when a child was born, the first question was whether the child was a boy or a girl. Parents showed a preference for the male child because it was thought that he would occupy the father's homestead at his father's death and inherit his legacies, thus helping to perpetuate the family name. The girl on the other hand, would be given out in marriage and be lost to another family. During the socialization process, the male child was made to realize that he was more valuable than his female counterpart. In the early days of western education when it was viewed with suspicion, parents withheld their loved male children from school, and only sent the girls and boys who were not loved. Later, when it became a tool of empowerment, many parents opted to train only their male children at the expense of the females, whose education was considered a waste of funds.

At the domestic front, division of labour was based on gender. In a traditionally agricultural economy, gender ideology played a prominent role in the economic advantage of the men over the women. To start with the crops were divided into men and women crops. Men grew the more desirable and economically profitable crops like rice, white yams etc. while the women grew the less desirable and less profitable crops like water yam, cocoyam, aerial yam etc. Similarly, while it was the duty of the woman to work on her husband's farm on certain designated days, the man was not under any such obligation to work for his wife. Certain jobs were also left exclusively for the male and the female genders in the Ikwo culture. For example, hunting was a man's exclusive domain while the woman was supposed to handle the domestic activities of fetching water, cooking and taking care of babies, thus further entrenching the perception that the men were stronger and the women weaker. And while the proceeds from hunting could be sold for money, the outcomes of the woman's domestic endeavours were to be had free of charge by the man and his children, further weakening the economic power of the woman while strengthening that of the man.

A similar scenario was operational at the political front. Women were excluded from clan and community meetings where important decisions about the welfare of all were taken. It was usually an all-male affair except where a dispute involving a man and his wife was to be settled in such a forum, in which case the woman was invited as an accused or defendant or witness. At other times, an exclusively male forum took decisions binding on both sexes in the community. However, women had their own forum where decisions on issues of exclusive interest to them were taken without the interference of men. But their exclusion from the general meetings of the community further undermined their importance relative to men.

Other cultural practices that helped to set up the hegemonic influence of men over women in the Ikwo society, and which were based on the society's gender ideology included marriage practices in which the man is meant to pay large sums of money (the cash equivalent of a rural farmer's annual crop harvest) as bride price in addition to the high cost of organizing marriage ceremonies. Such arrangement gives the man the impression of having bought a commodity which he can then use and dispose of as it pleases him. It makes the woman worth no more than the amount of money paid on her head by her husband, thus making the woman an object of merchandise rather than the priceless human being she is. Even Christianity with its requirement of subordination of the wife to her husband when it arrived with western education did not help matters for the average Ikwo woman.

The proverbs and the other cultural practices that tended to privilege the male and inferiorize the female in the traditional societies have been criticized for their negative implications on the society's perception of women as well as women's perception of themselves and their attitudes towards proverbs and the society in general. These proverbs and practices tended to portray women in negative lights before men, leading to the confinement of women to roles considered slightly below those of men, for example cooking in the kitchen (Hussein, 2004; 2005; 2009). The proverbs that perpetrated them undermined the face want of women, that is, the desire to be accepted and respected as full members of society, and desire not to be imposed upon by others (Oha, 1998). The consequences are that in some societies like the Igbo society, the trend has turned the interest of women away from proverbs (Oha, 1998; Mmadike, 2014). In the Ikwo society, it might have very similarly undermined the confidence of women in their individual and collective abilities and turned their interest away from active participation in public affairs, especially politics.

However, the arrival of western education, with its empowerment of men and women alike helped to bridge the gender divide created by the culture both at the domestic and the political fronts. At the domestic front, equal access to education has enabled women to train as professionals and earn as much income as their male counterparts. Such economic empowerment has enabled them to break free from the hegemonic domination of the man as the sole bread winner, who must always call the shots, and lord it over the woman. At the political arena, the introduction of democracy has given men and women equal opportunities to occupy public offices, from where they can influence policies that impact on the whole society. Indeed, Ikwo women have occupied such political positions as councillors, local government chairpersons, state and national assembly positions etc. In Africa, a woman was the president of Liberia. These developments have given rise to such slogans as "What a man can do, a woman can do, and even better" and "Behind every successful man, there is always a woman."

This study believes that the offending proverbs should be reworked to rid them of their sexist tones by formulating female gender-tolerant or gender-neutral versions (Asiyanbola, 2007; Balogun 2010). While Asiyanbola suggested that for every gender-biased proverb, a gender neutral one should be formulated, Balogun believed all such proverbs should be "reconstructed through the proper education and rigorous commitment to the feminine course" (Balogun 2010, p. 31), believing that such reconstructive engagement with proverbs will give rise to new proverbs with new meanings and values. If the above proposals are applied to the sexist Ikwo proverb 4.6.4. *Onye gide nwanyi meru eji vu iphe le ishi ekpori* [person use woman do [head] pad carry thing in head bare] meaning that anyone who uses a woman as a pad is carrying his load on bare head, the proverb will be transformed to *Onye gide madzu meru eji*

vu iphe le ishi ekpori [person use person do [head] pad carry thing in head bare] meaning that anyone who uses anyone as a pad is carrying his load on bare head.

In the above form the proverb is rid of its sexist tone, having taken the neuter gender, and can be applied equally to either a man or a woman. Women alone are no longer the ones regarded as unreliable according to the original meaning of the proverb. The original sexist proverb has given rise to a new expression with a new meaning and value, aimed at reversing the perceived negative image of women by deconstructing the patriarchal representation of Ikwo women by sexist proverbs

Many years of feminist movements and campaign for the equality of rights between men and women have resulted in a gradual narrowing and near complete disappearance of gender discrimination in many parts of the world. In the Ikwo society, though this is not yet the case, significant improvements in gender relations have been recorded. Thanks to the efforts of some women who have fought back men's subjugation and oppression with such expressions as *Iphe nwoke e eme be nwanyi e eme yiya jara* [Thing man can do is woman can do add extra] meaning that what a man can do a woman can do better.

In the category of The Aged in Society, the elders stand in binary opposition to the youths in a sort of generational conflict (Connell, 1995). Also following from Lévi-Strauss' assertion, the youth can only be understood in relation to the elderly by appreciating the strengths of each stage in life. The youth with their abundance of energy and forward-looking approach to life can drive the future. The elderly with their benefit of hindsight and experience can offer wise advice and guidance to the young. Through such understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each, the need arises for a consensus or balance between the two to get the best out of each group for the betterment of society.

In most traditional African societies, primogeniture, the respect for age is the fulcrum upon which the socio-political system turns. Under this system, the elders and the youthful age grades working in partnership with women and other groups form the government that runs the day to day affairs of different communities. However, the elders are the senior partners in this partnership as we read about the Umuaro society, based on Achebe's *Arrow of God*:

There was a clan system of village primogeniture to give order to group events. There was an open system that encouraged social mobility and thereby individual enterprise to contribute to communal development. Separate age groups had the privilege of meeting to the exclusion of others to discuss issues related to themselves but their plans had to be submitted to the elders for decision (Nwoga, 1981, p. 29).

So, the elders wielded enormous political powers in the society because they formed the decision-making body in a government system that can be likened to gerontocracy today in many Igbo societies. Under the system, while the elders made the laws, took important decisions and administered justice, the youths together with the women groups implemented them.

Other reasons accounted for the high regard the elders enjoyed in their different societies. For example, Moemeka (1997) observes that among the Igbos, gerontocracy or leadership by the elders is the common type of community leadership in practice even till this day. And that such a leader enjoys a very high degree of respect because:

The community leader in communalistic societies is the first citizen. Once appointed or selected, the leader is bestowed with the honour and prestige befitting that position and is treated with utmost respect and dignity. In many communities, the leader is both the temporal and spiritual head and is therefore seen as representing divine authority...next only to the Almighty (ibid, p. 179).

Many reasons account for the respect and prestige accorded to elders in many traditional African societies. These include the executive function they perform by the leadership role they play as the heads in their families and societies (Moemeka, 1997); the judicial function they perform by helping to settle disputes that arise between individuals, families and communities (Agbaje, 2002); their role as care-givers in the upbringing of children (Arewa and Dundes, 1964) and the advisory role they play in their communities, whose futures are intricately linked with the type and quality of advice they give. They are helped in the discharge of these duties by their perceived closeness to the ancestors and God from whom they draw wisdom expressed in their use of proverbs. According to Moemeka (ibid, p. 181): "The elders are the repositories of wisdom and knowledge and, therefore, regarded as assets of great value to the community." In the words of Agbaje (ibid, 237) "they constitute the repository of traditional intelligence, logic and verbal or oral wit."

Leadership by the elders also enjoys a lot of popularity because it is thought to be based on principles "compatible with democracy" (Raffinot and Venet, 2011, p. 3). Its all-inclusive nature ensures the active participation of all stakeholders in the running of their affairs through a smooth process of transition of power among contending interest groups in the society. In this sense, the age grades or age sets could be regarded as the groups or political parties contending for leadership positions. Gerontocracy guarantees that every adult member of society takes a shot at leadership when it is the turn of his age grade, without fail. Thus, the system ensures a sure, systematic and peaceful transition of power.

The respect accorded elders and their leadership roles notwithstanding, the elders have been criticized for their lack of innovation and their "tendency to maintain the *status quo*" (Atella and Carbonari, 2013, p. 2). As such they have been considered unsuitable for leadership in a modern world in which the ability to take progressive economic, social and political decisions is key to the growth and development of societies. Leaderships in which the elders are the predominant class have often been accused of investing less in human capital and in productive public services, thereby depressing the economic development of their societies (ibid). In this sense, opponents of gerontocracy argue that it is harmful to growth.

This study suggests a system in which the elderly and the youth would work together to make the best of the experience of the elderly and the energy and innovation of the youth to build a socially less conflictive and economically stronger society. In this regard, the traditional societies could offer some guidance to overcome contemporary obsessions with youth and young leadership devoid of the checks and balances of the elderly.

Many proverbs stand in opposition to each other. For example, the Ikwo proverb *Iphe ogerenya nodu anodu phu be nwata nyihuru eli oshi t'aphudu* [Thing elder stay seated see is child climb top tree not see] meaning that what the elder sees sitting down, a youth cannot see even from a tree top, stands in sharp contrast to *Nwaije ka onye ishi ewo omaru iphe* [Traveller pass person head grey know things] meaning that the adventurous youth is often wiser than the sedentary elder. At the heart of these two proverbs is the controversy of who has the monopoly of knowledge, the elders or the youths. The first proverb follows on from the

exertion of power in the Ikwo society in which the older men seek to exert their power over the youths, not only in their right to use proverbs but also in their duty of obedience to the elders. Such proverbs are thus sources of traditional power mostly used by older males to exert their unfair traditional power structure over younger males. But the second proverb challenges this traditional power by insisting that the youth who is educated (perhaps through travel which is part of education) is more knowledgeable than the sit-at-home elder. These two proverbs set up a conflict which needs to be resolved by another proverb which holds a consensus view, for example that no one person has monopoly of knowledge as often heard in the rhetorical question: *Ka I ma nkea I ma nke ozo?* [As you know this you know the other?

Within proverbs there also exist similar oppositions in meaning in what paremiologists refer to as multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994, Yankah, 1994). But by juxtaposing two extreme and opposing views and values, such proverbs usually perceived as contradictory seek to urge humans to follow the path of moderation to achieve harmony with self, with others and with the environment. We see this wise admonition reflected in such seemingly contradictory English proverb pair as: *Absence makes the heart grow fonder* (Manser, 2007, p. 1) and *Out of sight, out of mind* (ibid, p. 219). These two proverbs, though apparently contradictory, reflect two extreme truths about the effect of distance on love. But what these proverbs have in common and which they seek to teach humans is to strike a balance in the way in which they use absence in their love relationships. This is because at one extreme, it can rejuvenate love while at another extreme it can kill it. In other words, too much absence can either restore love or destroy it. Put differently, if you apply total absence in your relationship with one lover, it may strengthen the love, whereas if you apply the same total absence in your relationship with another lover, it may weaken the love. Even if you apply total absence on the same lover, the chances are that at one time it could strengthen the relationship, at another time it could weaken it. The wise thing to do then, is to use it in moderation, which is, never allow total absence over a prolonged period. Alternate presence with absence at short intervals. Here lies the traditional wisdom of proverbs and the need to preserve them together with the languages and cultures in which they are expressed.

5.2. Resolution of the conflicts generated by opposing views

This subsection will discuss the resolution of the opposing views generated by the opposing proverbs as recommended by Lévi-Strauss through dialectics as a way of arriving at a consensus view. One of the key points of Lévi-Strauss' structuralist theory is that conflicts generated by opposing views can be reconciled through dialectics, the process of reconciling the thesis and its antithesis through their synthesis. In practical terms, I think that this resolution can be arrived at by either of two processes. In the first, people from either extreme of view give up part of their view point and embrace part of the others' view point through a process of "give and take," "compromise," "moderation," "middle course" etc. of thoughts and actions. In the second, a new generation of citizens embrace new ideologies that transform their thinking and give rise to a new set of views marked by a new set of proverbs, confirming the theory that worldviews evolve (Olumbe, 2008). Resolving the conflicts generated by the opposing views thus results in the emergence of a third category of views which can be described as the evolving, emerging or consensus worldview.

From the category of Life and the Living we have seen the emergence of proverbs like *Onye mekotaru ehu iya ekwe ndawerere* [Person organize body his echoes chorus]. The proverb implies that it is only those who have achieved personal success that are able to join the

(communal) chorus, that is the league of the prominent in society. The proverb thus signals a paradigm shift in thinking by recognizing individual efforts as a means of achieving group recognition, no longer a route to group isolation. Thus, a meeting point is established between communalism and individualism through a consensus view of the two systems.

From the category of Death and the Great Beyond, the emergence of consensus views about the need to take one's destiny into one's hand has given rise to such expression as *Onye kwe chi ya e kwe* [Person agree god his will agree]. The expression acknowledges that though the gods play a role in one's destiny, such role is reduced to the passive role of affirmation of the decisions of the individual. The individual takes the driver's seat and takes the decision while the gods concur. He is no longer bound to the dictates of the gods but is released to pursue his talents free of the hindering influences of the gods and ancestors. Similarly, *Iphe onye kwetaru e jeru iya ozhi* [Thing person believes it goes him message] meaning that whatever one believes in works for him/her suggests that the controversy over who controls man's destiny is resolved by holding fast to what one believes; that whatever one believes strongly in works for him, whether one believes in the gods or in oneself.

In the category of Gender Relations, the emergence of the consensus expression, *Iphe nwoke e eme be nwanyi e eme yiya jara* [Thing man can do is woman can do add extra], implying that what a man can do a woman can do, and even better is also an indication of the outbreak of a better understanding in the relationships between men and women and a departure from the traditional patriarchal notion that women are inferior to men. The proverb-like expression reflects the belief in the equality of both sexes, and the ability of anyone to excel irrespective of sex. No sex is inherently weak or strong; strength is according to other personal circumstances unrelated to sex.

The notion that no one has the monopoly of knowledge or strength is the consensus view that emerges from opposing views in the category of The Aged in Society. Such an understanding has also given rise to such consensus expression in question form as *Ka I ma nkea I ma nke ozo?* [As you know this do you know that?]. The question implies that no one knows it all, that no one can do it all alone, and that working in mutual relationship of cooperation, more can be achieved.

From the category of Children and Youths comes the proverb-like expression, *A zua nwa nwa azua onye odo* [One train child child train person other] meaning that if a child is trained the child will train another. Here, the controversy of whether the child is an asset or liability does not matter. What matters is the upbringing given to a child. A well trained and supported child will no doubt be an asset to society while an untrained and unloved child will turn out to be a thorn in the flesh of society.

Finally, from the category of Man and Nature, the expression, *Ege i meru ali be ali e me ngu* [As you do land is land will do you] meaning that what you give to nature determines what you get back from it. This implies that nature gives to man what man gives to it. As such, if man treats nature kindly, nature will treat him kindly and vice versa. The issue of whether nature is friend or foe to us depends on us.

5.3. Consensus view as "liminal category" as contributed by Leach to the structuralist theory.

This subsection will discuss the emergence of consensus-oriented expressions which represent the worldviews of the borderline members of society. This opens the Ikwo proverb space wider and makes room for the critical interrogation of their proverb knowledge and worldview if included in an education programme.

To Lévi's idea of strict binary oppositions, Leach (1964) added the idea of the "borderline, liminal category, partaking of both poles of the opposition, but belonging completely to neither" (ibid, p. cited in Foley, 1997, p. 102). The liminal category of view, to my mind represents a point between the opposing views at which a common ground is reached and a common understanding is achieved between holders of opposing views.

As pointed out earlier, this can be arrived through dialogue or through evolutionary trends in society. Both are processes of negotiating social relationships and producing new viewpoints and new proverbs in any given society, thus confirming the dialogic nature of discourse (proverbs), being full of the words of others, historically transmitted, and which we apply to our present circumstances, and used to propagate a people's viewpoint (Bakhtin, 1981; Foley, 1997). According to Bakhtin, it is this notion of the multiple voices in dialogic texts (proverbs) that reflect the cultural, historical and personal perspectives of members of a culture that is called polyphony or heteroglossia. It is this prior text or intertextual nature of proverbs, the multiplicity of the voices that go into producing them and the social history which they convey that qualify them as the index of the people's worldview.

However, this study is of the view that if this dialogic and evolutionary process omits any section of the society, the resultant worldview cannot be said to be truly reflective of the people's complete view, hence the need for the liminal category of view. The emergence of the liminal category is also a confirmation of the dynamism, the pragmatism and the evolutionary nature of proverbs and the worldview they express (Olumbe, 2008). The category gives rise to consensus-oriented proverbs. Such proverbs help to bridge the ideological divide between the opposing proverbs, and constitutes a resolution of the conflict created by opposing views

The significance of the liminal category in proverb discourse is that it signals a paradigm shift in thinking and gives rise to new consensus-oriented proverbs and viewpoints. In the society, it heralds the emergence of new patterns of thinking which tends to accommodate all shades of opinion. It reflects the principles of democracy by which everyone has a say and is the surest guarantee of a just and peaceful society.

The consensus worldview is significant because it acknowledges that though conflicts exist in all spheres of human existence and in all areas of the human experience, such conflicts can always be resolved amicably through the spirit of accommodation, give and take, compromise, consensus building in interpersonal relationships; and the attitude of moderation, toeing the middle course and avoiding the extremes in our personal lives. Such view and the positive attitude to life which it generates would reduce frictions, foster peaceful coexistence and lead to a world where conflicts are reduced to the barest minimum.

The identification of a consensus worldview in addition to the opposing worldviews which had characterized the outcome of previous researches in this area, seems to me, the main contribution of this study to knowledge in the field of worldview analysis. This is in addition to

a new definition of the proverb and new approaches to proverb and worldview analysis adopted for this study.

This study is of the view that any society wishing to be considered as modern, democratic and developed should aspire to advance its proverbs and viewpoints to include the liminal category. Only then will such proverbs and the worldviews they express be considered representative of the people enough to be taught to children. Ikwo proverbs and their viewpoints are yet to achieve this, hence the need for more research on the Ikwo language and culture to bring it at par with other developed languages and cultures of the world.

5.4. Research findings as contribution to knowledge

This subsection will present the major findings of this thesis as its major contribution to knowledge.

The most significant of these is the emergence of consensus-oriented proverbs that represent the borderline view in addition to opposing worldviews which had characterized other research outcomes in the field of worldview analysis. Not only has this research shown that Ikwo proverbs showed similar opposing views as Igbo and other cultures' proverbs, it has identified some consensus-oriented Ikwo proverbs and proverb-like expressions which represent the liminal category of proverbs that has been marginalized by previous researches and as such not been identified or acknowledged/highlighted in contemporary Igbo or other research. This is in addition to a new definition of the proverb proposed by me in chapter two and the new approaches to proverb and worldview analyses discussed in chapter three and applied in chapter four.

This study also established that the Ikwo language and culture is an endangered species by using the available criteria for assessing language and culture endangerment. The *Ethnologue* had earlier classified the language and culture as "developing" (Lewis *et al*, 2014). This categorization implies that the language is developed to the extent that it has a standard literature, whereas this is not the case. By using the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGDIS) (Lewis and Simon, 2010), this study found that the language is "In Trouble" and "Dying" (Lewis *et al*, 2014) because even though the language is used orally by some members of the child-bearing generation, some of them are not transmitting it to their children, nor is the language taught to children in schools in the area. The study thus identified the gap in knowledge around proverb study by establishing the paucity or dearth of scholarly research on the Ikwo proverb. The significance of this finding is that it attracts scholarly attention not only to the Ikwo language and culture, but also to other minority endangered languages and cultures around the world.

The study identified and applied a new definition of the proverb thus: A proverb is a relatively short but complete statement based on experience conveying traditional wisdom in figurative language to guide behaviour in a society. This working definition is structurally and functionally adequate for this study because structurally, it distinguishes a proverb from other figurative or metaphoric expressions like idioms (which are usually phrases, not sentences). Functionally, it captures the communicative role of proverbs – to provide a guide to the accepted codes of behaviour in a society. If the above definition is accepted as correct, this study would have made its own modest contribution in the search for an acceptable definition for the genre.

In terms of methodology, it adopted new approaches to proverb and worldview analyses. Proverb analysis was based on the functional approach to meaning (Seitel, 1976, Yankah, 1989) by which emphasis was placed on proverb “performance” rather than proverb “reporting.” This approach recognizes that different speakers use proverbs for different purposes, as strategies to establish their ethnic or gendered identities, and negotiate power based on age, gender, class and ethnicity. This is different from proverb use as “texts” in which proverbs are analysed as “fixed” or frozen sayings presenting a fixed view of reality by previous researches. The significance of the approach is that it helped to arrive at the contextual meaning of proverbs unlike previous researches which failed to take local context into account.

Worldview analysis based on the Lévi-Strauss structuralist view of meaning-in-opposition (Durant, 1997) led to the identification of the “consensus” worldview which is a different outcome from the results of previous researches, which only identified opposing worldviews. The identification of the consensus-oriented worldview based on Leach (1964) liminal category is significant because it constitutes a resolution of the conflicts generated by the opposing worldviews.

The analysis found that Ikwo proverbs considered together reflected opposing worldviews on all issues. The analysis also found that such binary views polarized the Ikwo society along two parallel and opposing ideological lines. This finding is in line with Lévi-Strauss’s (1963) structuralist theory of thought: that human thoughts are organized in binaries of opposing views giving rise to his meaning-in-opposition view of meaning. This implies that the meaning of all social phenomena can only be understood in relation to other phenomena to which they are opposed. It also implies that the binary grouping of human thought conveyed in proverbs makes for easy analysis of the relationships that exist between these opposites, leading to a resolution of the conflicts that might be generated. The process of such resolutions lead to shifts or compromises that reduce intra and interpersonal conflicts, ultimately leading to social harmony.

It also found that the Ikwo proverb space was dominated by the predominantly elderly male, non-literate rural dwellers, who used proverbs to perpetrate and perpetuate their hierarchical dominance over the weaker members of the society such as women and children. As such, the majority of Ikwo proverbs and the worldviews they expressed reflected the views of this group, not the interests of all social groups in the Ikwo society. This finding confirms the findings of other researches on the issue of dominance of proverb discourse by a section of society.

But the most important finding of this study is that it identified the liminal space represented by the borderline, peripheral members of the society who are left out in the proverb space, and some consensus-oriented expressions that represent their view that has been marginalized in contemporary Igbo or other research, as its major contribution to knowledge around proverb and worldview research.

5.5. Way forward for Ikwo language and culture maintenance/revival and conclusion

This subsection will discuss why and how Ikwo proverbs should be taught in contemporary school curricula. It suggests the need for further research and a programme of education as a space for the critical interrogation of Ikwo proverb view/knowledge and its potential for saving the language and culture from extinction will also be discussed.

At the end of chapter four, this study identified the liminal space and some consensus-oriented proverb-like expressions which represent the views of hitherto marginalized members of the Ikwo community in the proverb space. The study is of the view that if a safe space is created for the critical interrogation of Ikwo proverb knowledge and views in a school programme, more of such consensus-oriented expressions might evolve. With time they may achieve the traditionality and other requirements to become proverbs. Apart from enriching the Ikwo proverb stock, such new proverbs which represent the interests of those hitherto turned off proverb use might rekindle their interest in the genre, and the language and culture in which it is used.

This study argues that the integration of Ikwo proverbs in a programme of education is likely to enhance the understanding and critical interrogation of key aspects of traditional local knowledge as well as developments of global knowledge that could contribute to a reassessment of the importance of Ikwo language and culture, which might ultimately save it from extinction. Such programme would be in line with the dialogic nature of discourse (proverb) production whose process involves the multiple voices of different social groups in society. Bakhtin (1981) refers to this notion of the multiple voices in proverb production that reflects the cultural, historical and personal perspectives of members of a culture as polyphony or heteroglossia. It is this intertextual nature of the proverbs and worldviews that will emerge through this process, the multiplicity of the voices that will go into producing them as well as the social history which they will convey that will qualify the emerging consensus-oriented proverbs and worldviews as a welcome addition to the Ikwo proverb repertoire. If the process succeeds in expanding the Ikwo proverb space and rekindling the interests of hitherto excluded groups from proverb participation, it might help to save the Ikwo language and culture from the threat imminent extinction facing it.

This study is a scratch on the surface of the Ikwo language and culture. However, it has served as an eye opener on the need for further research and funding for a better understanding of minority languages and cultures, and the potential benefits derivable from such studies for national development. In terms of research, this study has shown that research into minority endangered languages and cultures in Nigeria is still at rudimentary levels. Many of such languages and cultures are yet to have standardized orthographies. Their literatures are not yet developed. Their music, dance, arts, artefacts and cultural practices are yet to be harnessed and showcased to the world. Further researches on the languages and cultures of such minority groups will lead to the development of standard orthography and writing system for teaching their language in schools and colleges. Further researches on their literatures will lead to a proper articulation of their worldview as expressed in their proverbs, folktales, music, dance etc. Further research on their cultures will help to unearth their art forms, technologies, foods, modes of dressing and other unique cultural practices that stand them out in the committee of other languages and cultures of the world.

To achieve the above objectives, funding is of critical importance. Apart from awarding scholarships for studies in these languages and cultures, there is the need to establish and adequately fund institutes for research on endangered languages and cultures at the indigenous universities of the states where such language speakers are domiciled. For example, in Ebonyi State, where many of the speakers of Ikwo language live, such institute could be established at the Department of Linguistics and Literary Studies, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Such an institute would be like the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), located at the Linguistics Department of the University of Oklahoma, United States of America.

The institute has been responsible for documenting and reporting on the endangerment situation of world languages since its inception. However, beyond identifying where such languages are spoken, the number of speakers and level of endangerment, the SIL does not provide any further roadmap on ways to develop such languages and cultures to save them from extinction.

The research institutes suggested will go beyond the mandate of the SIL by funding research on individual languages and cultures within its catchment area, with a view to developing a standard orthography, a standard literature and standard curriculum as well as developing its culture and teaching it to children in the area. Now, none of these languages are being taught to children due to lack of trained manpower and research facilities to develop a curriculum for teaching them. On the internet, little or no information exists about these languages and cultures beyond sketchy information provided by the SIL regarding their endangerment status, and the call for the world to act to save them from extinction. So far, the world appears to have paid deaf ears to such calls. This research and others to follow in response to these suggestions will form the needed response to the call of SIL and other well-meaning agencies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In addition to research and funding, there should be a multi-sectoral approach in the efforts to save endangered languages and cultures. A programme of attitudinal reorientation should be launched to educate the homes, the community, the schools and governments on the need to save the endangered languages and cultures, and their roles in the process (Fishman, 1991, 2001; Grenoble and Whaley, 2006; Hinton and Hale, 2008).

The potentials of further research on endangered minority languages and cultures in Nigeria are enormous.

First, the surest way to save an endangered language and culture is to invest in teaching and research as well as manpower development in the language. Such investment will increase interest in and the domains of use of the language. It will also elevate the status of the language from being a home language to a language of education, commerce, and government, and on to a regional or even national language, thus guaranteeing its safety.

Secondly, in a country currently ridden with inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts, a better understanding of the worldviews of each ethnic and religious group through their proverbs will lead to improved intercultural understanding and enhanced peaceful co-existence among the groups. Most of the communication barriers that lead to misunderstanding and conflicts will be broken, leading to improved inter-group relations and a resolution of the conflicts that have threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. The minority languages and cultures feel left out in the scheme of things in the country. It is of critical importance that they are given the attention and recognition they deserve to guarantee the peace and unity of Nigeria. The time for action is now.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of Research

Summary of Research

Proverbs and worldviews: an analysis of Ikwo proverbs and their worldviews

Onwe, Azubuike Franklin

Language and culture endangerment is a worldwide phenomenon with dire consequences (Fishman, 1991, 2001; Hale, 1992; Crawford, 1995, 2007; Krauss, 1992, 2007; Crystal, 2000; Nettle and Romaine, 2000; May, 2005, 2008; Tsunoda, 2006; Grenoble and Whaley, 2006; Holmes, 2008; Austin and Sallabank, 2011). This is because when languages and cultures die, people's identities die with them and the world diminishes in diversity.

The focus of this study is the Ikwo language and culture, catalogued in the *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al, 2013). It is language number 458 on the language map of Nigeria.

It aims to identify which Ikwo worldview(s) are represented in their proverbs, to determine if it/they represented the views of all social groups, and to discuss why and how Ikwo proverbs should be taught in contemporary school curricula.

This study is based on Lévi-Strauss' (1963) structuralism as a means of understanding the structure and meaning of social phenomenon (culture). The tool of analysis used was semiotics. The worldview analysis model used was the Winick (2001) model of sorting proverbs into groups that expressed opposing views, and the structuralist meaning-by-opposition model of Lévi-Strauss (Duranti, 1997).

It adopted the mixed methods in the collection and analysis of data because of the complementary effects of both methods on each other. While the one was used to present data in the form of numbers, the other was used to present data in the form of words, the one corroborating information conveyed by the other (Blaxter *et al*, 2010).

The study identified few consensus-oriented proverb-like expressions in Ikwo and suggests the need for further research and teaching programme which could lead to the evolution of more consensus-oriented proverbs and worldviews, likely to enhance the understanding and critical interrogation of Ikwo proverbs and contribute to a reassessment of the importance of Ikwo language and culture, which might ultimately save it from extinction.

Appendix 2: Ethics review checklist for research with human participants

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST FOR RESEARCH WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Date 08.12.10. V1.0

Name:	Azubuike Onwe	SID:	
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Title of Research Project:	Proverbs and worldviews: an analysis of Ikwo proverbs and their worldviews
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Faculty:	ALSS	Supervisor(s):	Prof. Guido Rings, Dr. Anne Ife
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Type of research: <i>Tick all that apply</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate degree <input type="checkbox"/> Taught postgraduate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Member of staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other
--	--

If you require this checklist or any of the documentation in an alternative format (e.g. Braille, large print, audio or electronically) please contact XXX

You need to consider ethics for all research studies. Research is defined in the UREC (Research Ethics Sub Committee) Policy and Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research with Human Participants on Page 5. Please refer to:

http://www.anglia.ac.uk/ruskin/en/home/central/rds/services/research_office/research_degrees/ethics.html

Please complete this mandatory Ethics Review Checklist for all research applications. This is to ensure that you are complying with Anglia Ruskin University Policy and Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research with Human Participants.

All research applications are dealt with in the same way. There is no distinction between undergraduate, taught Masters, research degree students and staff research.

For research involving animals, please complete the Animal Ethics Review Checklist to determine your course of action.

This checklist should be completed by the Principal Investigator or the student in consultation with his/her supervisor.

If your study requires a Risk Assessment, this must be submitted with your application. Please contact XXX for further information.

CHECKLIST

	YES	NO
1. Does your research involve human participants? (including observation only)	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does your research involve accessing personal, sensitive or confidential data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
3. Does your research involve 'relevant material' as defined by the Human Tissue Act (2004)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
4. Does your research involve participants who are 16 years and over who lack capacity to consent and therefore fall under the Mental Capacity Act (2005)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
5. Will the study involve NHS patients, staff or premises <i>or</i> Social Services users, staff or premises?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X

If you have answered **NO** to *all* the above questions, you do not need formal ethics approval. You do, however, need to submit this checklist signed and dated to the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Panel (FREP) Administrator prior to starting your research.

If you have answered **YES** to *either* or *both* Questions 1 and 2, you need to submit an application, including this checklist, to your FREP.

If you have answered **YES** to Question 3, you need either to submit your application to your FREP or an NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC), even if the study does not involve the NHS. Please seek further advice if you are unsure about which committee it needs to be submitted to.

If you have answered **YES** to Question 4, you need to seek approval from an NHS REC, even if your study does not involve the NHS.

If you have answered **YES** to Question 5, you need to obtain approval from:

- a. Both an NHS REC and the NHS Trust(s) where you are carrying the research out (R&D Management Approval) *or*
- b. The Local Research Governance Group (Social Services).

Please note that you must send a copy of the final approval letter(s) to:

Beverley Pascoe, RESC Secretary, Research, Development and Commercial Services.

Additional information: n/a

Applicant's signature:

Date:

6th November
2012

Supervisor's signature:

Date:

6th November
2012

All materials submitted to RESC/FREP will be treated confidentially.

Appendix 3: Ethics application form

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM IN WORD PROCESSING FORMAT. HANDWRITTEN APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

Name	Onwe, Azubuike Franklin
Faculty	Arts, Law and Social Sciences
Title of Proposed Research	Proverbs and worldviews: an analysis of Ikwo proverbs and their worldviews
Address	
E-mail address	
Type of Researcher (please tick)	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate student Postgraduate student: <input type="checkbox"/> Masters <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Doctorate <input type="checkbox"/> Other please state..... <input type="checkbox"/> Member of staff
Supervisor/Project Director	Prof. Guido Rings and Dr. Anne Ife
Collaborators	
Expected date of commencement	September 2012
Approximate duration	3 years
Externally funded	<input type="checkbox"/> Though my Ph.D. programme is sponsored, my research topic is neither influenced by my sponsors nor separately funded. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

The University offers indemnity insurance to researchers who have obtained formal written ethics approval for their research. For details see page 25 of “*Ethics Committee Procedures for the Conduct of Research*”.

1. Briefly describe the rationale for and state the value of the research you wish to undertake.
<p>The Ikwo language, listed in the <i>Ethnologue</i> is among the 43% of languages estimated by UNESCO to be under the threat of extinction. This is because of the absence of an academic framework for teaching the language to our children in schools. As a result, there has been a dangerous shift from the language to the more dominant Igbo language. The value of this research is that it will provide the academic framework needed to develop a curriculum for teaching the language to our children and preserve the language in the archives both for further research and for posterity. In short, the endangered status of the language makes it imperative for it to be recorded and its culture documented and analysed before it goes into extinction.</p>
2. Suitability/qualifications of researchers to undertake the research.
<p>Skills acquired during the following trainings qualify me for this research:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. B.A. (Hons) English from the University of Nigeria Nsukka (Language stress) 1994 2. M.A. Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) from the University of Nigeria Nsukka (Topic: The mother tongue factor in teaching and learning English as a second language) 2004. 3. M.A. Intercultural Communication from Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge (Topic: Language shift in a globalizing world: lessons from past reversal efforts for the Aboriginal languages of the US, Canada and Australia) 2012.

<p>3. What are the aims of the research?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which Ikwo worldview(s) are expressed in their proverbs? 2. Do such worldview(s) represent the interests of all social groups of the Ikwo society? 3. Why and how should Ikwo proverbs be taught in contemporary school curricula?
<p>1. Briefly describe the overall design of the project</p> <p>The project is designed as a mixed method research which uses data collection, documentation and analysis to explore the proverbs that portray the communal lifestyle of the people and reflect the cultural values embodied in the language.</p>
<p>2. Briefly describe the methods of data collection and analysis</p> <p>The mixed method will be used in data collection and analysis. The analysis will be based on Levi-Strauss's structuralist theory of interpreting culture (Levi-Strauss, 1963). The tool of analysis will be semiotics and the worldview analysis model used will be the Winick (2001) model.</p>
<p>3. Describe the participants: give the age range, gender and any particular characteristics pertinent to the research project. <i>For experimental studies state the inclusion and exclusion criteria</i></p> <p>The participants will be male or female adult speakers of the language within the age range of 30-60 years, who though they speak English, are still fluent speakers of the language.</p>
<p>4. If your participants are under 18, please attach a copy of your clearance letter from the Criminal Records Bureau (if UK) or equivalent non-UK clearance, or, if not, explain below:</p> <p>Not applicable.</p>
<p>5. How will the participants be selected and recruited?</p> <p>Participants will be selected from among trustees of the Abakaliki Literacy and Translation Trust, a group that has over the years worked closely with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), USA for the sustenance of the language.</p>
<p>6. How many participants will be involved? For experimental studies, specify how the sample size was determined. In clinical trials, a Power calculation <i>must</i> be included.</p> <p>The participants will be 200 in number to reflect different segments that make up the Ikwo society.</p>
<p>7. What procedures will be carried out on the participants (if applicable)?</p> <p>Questionnaires and oral interviews only.</p>
<p>8. What potential risks to the participants do you foresee?</p>

There are no known risks involved. However, if any risks should arise, in the process of taking part in this study, the legal rights of participants will be protected.

9. How do you propose to ameliorate/deal with potential risks to participants?

Should any risks arise, the legal rights of participants will be protected.

10. What potential risks to the interests of the researchers do you foresee?

None are anticipated, but should any arise, the researchers are covered by Anglia Ruskin University insurance cover for researches conducted overseas.

11. How will you ameliorate/deal with potential risks to the interests of researchers?

They will be dealt with by the Anglia Ruskin University insurance cover.

12. Has a risk assessment been completed? (Yes/No) – link to risk assessment website - <http://web.anglia.ac.uk/anet/rdcs/compliance/index.phtml> (please be aware this must be kept on file and updated annually)

I think there are absolutely no risks involved in this research and hence no need for either risk assessment or insurance against such risks. My research does not include any medical or physical procedures that can either cause pain or endanger the life of my participants. Andrew Chapman (email of 18/12/2012) agrees that my research is covered by the Anglia Ruskin Insurance but recommends that I take out the Anglia Ruskin University free travel and personal accident insurance for my trips outside the UK.

13. How will you brief and debrief participants? (*Attach copy of information to be given to participants*)

My prospective participants will be approached in person and informed about the fact that our language is at risk of extinction. Their cooperation will be solicited to grant oral retelling of some specific proverbs whose subject matters relate to the area of interest of this research. Their oral renditions will be recorded, documented and analysed for preserving them and teaching them to our children. This way, the language and its culture can be saved from this imminent death. Their choice for the interview is based on their knowledge of the language and culture, being adult native speakers of the language. They will be informed that the result of the research will be submitted to Anglia Ruskin University for publication as part of the requirements for the award of a Ph.D. degree. They will also be assured that their confidentiality and anonymity will be protected if they so wish by the use of pseudonyms. (See Participant Information Sheet for more details).

14. Will informed consent be sought from participants?

Yes (*Please attach a copy of the consent form*)

x ☐

No

☐

If no, please explain below:

15. If there are doubts about participants' abilities to give informed consent, what steps have you taken to ensure that they are willing to participate?

Participants are competent, willing and able to give informed consent.

16. If participants are under 18 years of age please describe how you will seek informed consent
Not applicable.

17. How will consent be recorded?
Participants are willing and able to sign the consent form.

18. Will participants be informed of the right to withdraw without penalty?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If no, please detail the reasons for this:		

19. How do you propose to ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity?
Participants will be assured of their confidentiality and anonymity if they wish to have them preserved through the use of pseudonyms.

20. Please describe which of the following will be involved in your arrangements for storing data:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manual files (e.g. paper documents or X-rays) <input type="checkbox"/> Home or other personal computer <input type="checkbox"/> University computer <input type="checkbox"/> Private company or work-based computer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laptop computer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please define) video and audio cameras, tapes and disks etc.
Please explain, for each of the above, the arrangements you will make for the security of the data (please note that any data stored on computer must have password protection as a minimum requirement): Information contained in paper documents or video and audio recordings will not be exposed to the public while information held in my laptop will be password protected.

21. Will payments be made to participants?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, please specify:		

22. Modification of Proposal
Not applicable.

23. (EXTERNALLY-FUNDED PROJECTS ONLY) Has the funding body been informed of and agreed to abide by Anglia Ruskin University's Ethics Procedures and standards?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If no, please explain below:		
Though I am studying on the scholarship of the Ebonyi State Government of Nigeria, the choice of this research topic is neither influenced nor funded by the Government.		

24. (EXTERNALLY-FUNDED PROJECTS ONLY) Has the funder placed any restrictions on a) the conduct of the research b) publication of results?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>If yes, please detail below:</i>		
Not applicable.		

25. Are there any further points you wish to make in justification of the proposed research?
The outcome of this research will help to save an endangered language by restoring the sense of pride of its speakers on the language and its culture. It will also help to create an archive to allow for further development of the language and its further exploration by other researchers.

UREC REGISTER

UREC publishes a list of approved projects on the University intranet, which is searchable by all staff and students of the University. The entry for each project comprises the following data:

- project title
- funding body (if appropriate)
- duration of project
- date and expiry of ethics approval
- name of researcher

Inclusion on this list is a condition of ethics approval, unless the Committee is informed of compelling reasons for an exemption. If you wish to request that your information is withheld, please tick the box below and state the reasons for your request.

☐ **I do not wish my project details to be included on the UREC list for the following reasons:**

Please indicate that you are enclosing with this form the following completed documents:

x☐ Participant consent form x☐ Participant Information Sheet

x☐ Summary of the research

Signed _____

Date

Statement of Supervisor's / Project Director's support*

I support this application:

Signed _____

Date

Title _____

***applications not countersigned by a supervisor/project director will not be accepted; please note that this applies equally to members of staff who are also students**

Appendix 4: Participant information sheet



Department of English and Media
Anglia Ruskin University
East Road, Cambridge
CB1 1PT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Section A: The Research Project

1. **Title of project:** Saving endangered languages and cultures in Nigeria: a semantic analysis of Ikwo proverbs.
2. **Purpose and value of study:** The main purpose of this study is to record, document and analyse the proverb of the people as a way of preserving the language and culture from going into extinction. Its main value is that it will provide the academic framework needed to develop a curriculum for teaching the language to our children. It will also help our people to regain the lost pride in their language and encourage them to speak it to their children.
3. **Invitation to participate:** You are invited to participate in this project as an interviewee because you are a native speaker of the language and quite conversant with its proverbs. Secondly, as a trustee of the Abakaliki Literacy and Translation Trust (ALTT), you have devoted a substantial part of your life working for the sustenance and development of the language and its culture.
4. **Who is organising the research:** The research is organized by me, Mr Onwe Azubuike Franklin, a Ph.D. student at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK. The research has ethical approval from the University's Research Ethics Subcommittee (RESC)
5. **What will happen to the results of the study:** The result of the research will be submitted to Anglia Ruskin University as part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Ph.D. It may be posted on the internet as an interactive learning resource to encourage our web going children to learn the language as well as preserved in the archives for use in further research and for posterity.
6. **Source of funding for the research:** Apart from the fact that I am studying for my Ph.D. under the scholarship of the Ebonyi State Government of Nigeria, the topic of my research is neither influenced nor funded by the government or any other institution.
7. **Contact for further information:** .

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1. **Why you have been invited to take part:** You have been invited to take part because you are a native speaker of the language.

2. **Whether you can refuse to take part:** You are absolutely free to refuse to participate in this research or to withdraw from participating at any stage of the research simply by indicating to me either through email or by phone.
3. **Whether you can withdraw at any time, and how:** You can withdraw from the research at any point just by indicating your intention to withdraw as explained above. With regards to data already collected from you, you are also free to indicate whether such data should or should not be published, provided your instructions are received before such data is published.
4. **What will happen if you agree to take part (brief description of procedures/tests):** If you agree to take part, I will come to you at an appointed place and time suitable to you, for example your house, where you will be requested to retell some proverbs that portray the communal/collective lifestyle of our people while you are orally interviewed and recorded. You may also wish to submit such proverbs in writing.
5. **Whether there are any risks involved (e.g. side effects from taking part) and if so what will be done to ensure your wellbeing/safety:** There are no known risks involved. However, if you would not like to be identified by your real names, pseudonyms can be used in place of your name or your data reported anonymously.
6. Agreement to participate in this research should not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong. If you have any complaints, they should be addressed in the first instance to the researcher. If they are not resolved to your satisfaction they should then be addressed to the supervisor:
7. There are no special precautions to take before, during or after taking part in the study. Similarly, there are no known risks involved. But should any risks arise in the process of taking part in this research, your legal rights will be protected.
8. **What will happen to any information/data/samples that are collected from you:** Data collected from you will be analysed and submitted to the Anglia Ruskin University as part of the requirements for the award of the Ph.D. degree to me. It may also be posted on the internet as an interactive learning resource to encourage our web going children to learn the language as well as preserved in the archives for use in further research and for posterity.
9. **Whether there are any benefits from taking part:** There are no financial benefits accruable to you for taking part in this research.
10. **How your participation in the project will be kept confidential:** Your participation in this research can be kept confidential if you so wish through the use of pseudonyms in place of your real names.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP,
TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Appendix 5: Participant consent form



Department of English and Media
Anglia Ruskin University
East Road, Cambridge
CB1 1PT

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Name of participant:

Title of project: Proverbs and worldviews: an analysis of Ikwo proverbs and their worldviews

Main investigator and contact details: Azubuike Franklin Onwe
Anglia Ruskin University
East Road, Cambridge, UK
CB1 1PT

Members of the research team: Prof Guido Rings (First supervisor)
Dr Anne Ife (second supervisor)

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University¹ processing personal data which I have supplied.

I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research project as outlined to me*

Name of participant (print).....Sign.....Date.....

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

.....

¹ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of project:

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 6: Response to interview on level of endangerment of Ikwo language and culture.

Proverbs and worldviews: an analysis of Ikwo proverbs and their worldviews

Interview Questions and Answers

1. Sir, may I know your name and what you do for a living?

My name is John Igwe Ovuoba. I am a Bible Translator.

2. What organization do you work for?

I work with the Abakaliki Literacy & Translation Trust.

3. What is your portfolio in the organization?

We work in four languages: Izii, Ikwo, Ezaa and Mgbolizhia. I serve as a consultant coordinating the work in the four languages.

4. How long have you worked for the organization?

Well, I began Bible Translation work in 1973 under the Wycliffe Bible Translators/SIL.

At that time, Izii, Ikwo and Ezaa languages worked together as an extended Team. But each team focused primarily on the translation of the New Testament (NT) into her own language. In 1980, the NTs were published, each in its own language. From 1976 when the Wycliffe/SIL people were expelled by the Nigerian Government, I continued working, but with no organization directly. But in 1983, I was employed by the Nigeria Bible Translation Trust (NBTT), who, in January 1985, transferred me back to Abakaliki to coordinate the literacy work in the same languages. I was also given a new assignment to go to Ohaukwu Local Govt. Area and study the Mgbolizhia language, analyze it and develop its orthography. Mgbolizhia naturally joined the other three languages (Izii, Ikwo and Ezaa) and in a way to belong, the people decided to become an organization and call themselves “Abakaliki Literacy & Translation Committee” (ALTC). In 1998 when ALTC began literacy work and wanted to register with the Government, we discovered that we could not register as a Committee. Thus, we changed the name from ALTC to Abakaliki Literacy & Translation Trust (ALTT). And that is what we have now.

So, even though I have worked with different groups all through the period, I have consistently remained in the same job. So, for you to answer how long I have worked with “the organization”, you may be better to start counting from 1973.

5. What is the current practice and ways of disseminating the Ikwo language and culture?

In addition to the printed materials we have published and are all in circulation, we are basically encouraging the speaking, reading and writing of the language.

6. Do you believe that the Ikwo language and culture is endangered?

Ikwo language and culture is simply fading away. While one may say that some pieces of the language is still remaining, the culture is totally lost.

7. If so, what is the level/extent of endangerment?

I believe that we are at the second level of endangerment. By this I mean the second generation. We are in the second generation of speakers. We speak the language fairly well now. I put our children at the 3rd generation level. I believe that by the time they grow up and have their own children (4th generation), their own children may not speak the language any more.

8. What evidences suggest/support the above level of endangerment?

Even in our own generation which I group as 2nd generation, it is rare to find somebody who can complete a sentence in Ikwo language without mixing it with English or Igbo. The culture e.g. the festivals, dances and folk takes) are no more there.

9. What factors do you think led to this state of affairs?

I can think of two factors. The first one is economic and the second one is the Church. Those who speak English and/or Igbo are richer. They have more money and could build good houses in urban areas, buy cars and send their children to good schools. The people believe that in order to be as rich as those other people, one has to abandon the Ikwo language and learn English or Igbo.

The second factor is the Church. The pastor speaks English or Igbo even in their sermons in the most local areas. Then she (Church) condemned all the cultures of the people in its entirety including even those that were purely social in nature. So in order to understand and speak the language of the Church, one had to speak English or Igbo. Thus gradually, the culture died and the language is following it.

10. What efforts have been made to reverse to this trend?

We knew that the language was struggling between two powerful languages – English and Igbo. But we were not primarily fighting against the endangerment as we knew very little of endangered languages. We were rather (a) trying to help the people understand the reading and writing of the language (literacy), so that they can read and understand the translated scripture; and (b) help the primary school children know their language in its written form, so that it would help them in their educational career.

11. What institution(s) and text(s) have been of help in the fight to reverse the trend?

One organization, the Oikonomos Foundation (Holland) heard our plight and brought us some funds (1998-1999) which we used and published thousands of text books for use in the primary schools. (See our 2013 MTE Diary for details of the books we published in the four languages). They also provided funds for the training of teachers.

12. What institution(s) or agencies frustrate efforts to reverse the trend?

But the State Government frustrated it. Our agreement with the Government was that the teachers we trained should not be transferred from their schools until after three years. That will allow the pupils with whom we begin the program to round it up at Primary 3. But right after our training workshops which was nearly ran through the State, the teachers were transferred. And since it was a pilot program and we were given selected schools, with the trained teachers all transferred, we had nothing to work with again. Furthermore, the Government never paid for any of the books which they had promised to pay for.

13. What level of funding and other resources, do you think is required to reverse the trend?

Since a new Government is now in power and since most of the books were more or less lost (due to non-payment by the Government), we would have to get back to the Government to know if we still have the schools they gave us, after which we will do a school survey as well as a market survey to know exactly what level of funding we need. By this, we would have to know the number pupils we are working with, how many books to print and what the cost would be.

14. What level of funding and other resources have you received?

The money we received from the Oikonomos Foundation was quite huge. It was in a couple of millions in Nigerian currency, the naira. By huge here, I mean the amount that was used for the four languages. But if are concentrating in Ikwo alone, the money will be significantly lower.

15. What agency/agencies have provided funding/other resources for this fight?

As I mentioned in Q11 above, Oikonomos Foundation was the only organization that came out right to help us financially in the area of literacy.

16. What other types of encouragement have you received from other individuals?

We have received verbal encouragements from people, but nothing more than that.

17. What achievements have been made in the fight to reverse the trend?

The publication of the Ikwo Bible encouraged the people to see the need to read the Bible and keep the language. The Bible is just one among many reading materials that have been published in the language. Without such resources, we could have had nothing to work with. But with Azubuike Onwe's research among the people, a new awareness and concern is developing. For even though everyone wants to speak English and Igbo, nobody really saw the danger that sooner or later, nobody will be speaking the language again. So our publications and Azubuike Onwe's research is helping to reverse the situation.

18. Have all stakeholders (language community, schools and governments) been supportive?

They have been supportive in words only.

19. What more do you think should be done and by who to achieve set objectives?

We need to get back to the primary schools and use Ikwo text books to teach Ikwo to our children (literacy). We are currently working on what we call "Jesus Film" (based on the Gospel of Luke) which we will use for evangelism and scripture use in the language. We believe that repeated hearing of the same thing in the language will help to keep the spoken language. Introducing the language as a subject in a higher institution (like the College of Education and/or University) will also help. We will also use verbal competition of the language for secondary school children to challenge the problem. But at a higher level i.e more highly educated people, Azubuike Onwe's research, films and lectures will make a serious change.

20. What are the prospects of total recovery of lost grounds?

Hope is not lost. I believe that when the first group of Primary School pupils is taught the language up to the Primary School level, results will begin to show.

21. Are there any other comments/suggestions you would like to make towards achieving the overall objectives of this research?

We have the text resources to do the work. We have the audio-visual resources. It will be followed by the video/cassette audio system alone. Then we have the manpower who are available now to train more people. But we do not have the funds to reprint our work. If we have some financial support from anywhere, we will have a testimony in less than a decade.

Principal Researcher: Azubuike Onwe

Principal Respondent: Elder John Ovuoba

Appendix 7: Participant data collection survey (questionnaire)



Anglia Ruskin
University

Department of English, Communication,
Film and Media
Anglia Ruskin University
East Road, Cambridge
CB1 1PT

Dear Participant,

PARTICIPANT DATA COLLECTION SURVEY

This data collection survey is meant to collect data for the Ph.D. project entitled, *Saving endangered languages and cultures in Nigeria: a semantic analysis of Ikwo proverbs*.

The information you provide in this survey will be treated confidentially and kept anonymously. It will take less than 10 minutes of your time to complete.

Your completion of this survey confirms that the information you provide can be used in full or in abridged form for the purposes of the above research project.

You have the right to withdraw from participating in this research without penalty simply by indicating to the Principal Researcher by e-mail or phone.

You can write on the reverse side of the sheet in case you need extra writing space.

The aim of this research is to collect, document and analyse Ikwo proverbs with a view to teaching them along with our language and culture to our children in our schools in future. This way our language and culture will be saved from imminent extinction.

You are kindly requested to participate in this research by supplying one Ikwo proverb in current use in any one of the six categories below and answer the following questions about the proverb you have supplied.

S/N	Category	Your Ikwo Proverb and its English translation
1.	Life and living	Ikwo: English:
2.	Death and the great beyond	
3.	Gender relations	Ogeremda dara le etsu ugbo ebuo kwa idele b'o shi.
4.	The aged in society	
5.	Childhood and adolescence	
6.	Man and nature	

English: A fool at forty is a
fool¹ forever.

1. How can you interpret this proverb/what does this proverb mean to you?

It means that for one to continue repeating a bad thing is a sign of immaturity.

It means that I should learn from other people's mistake.

2. Under what context/situation is this proverb used?

It is used when a mistake is repeated and this mistake does not help anybody in the society.

3. What lesson(s) does it aim to teach/what purpose(s) does it aim to achieve or establish?

people should learn not to carry the mistake of the past to the future.

4. Which other proverb(s) mean the same as this proverb?

Ogerenya mee iphe, ~~ot~~-chi echachi;
echachi ala uko.

English: When an aged person commits an offence, he can't be disciplined.

5. Which other proverb(s) contradict this proverb?

Ogerenya ta-anijedu L'ufu te
otsobere nku nmaa mini.

English: In the presence of aged person, there is order.

6. Do you use this proverb yourself? If no, why?

Yes

7. Which proverb would you use instead?

8. Are there any proverbs you know that do not fit into the above six categories?
Please list them.

- (1) Epho -ji ohu; yò nyata egwu ali iya.
- (2) Ishi 0 kpuchata; ~~be~~ ishi; eshije
Leobabe eka iya.

Your Personal Details

(Please underline which options are applicable to you)

Sex: Male/Female

Age: 16 - 20/21 - 30/31 - 40/41 - 50/51 - 60/61 - 70/71 - 80/81 - 90/91 - 100/100 and above.

Address: Rural Dweller/Urban Dweller

Occupation: Civil Servant/ Public Servant/Farmer/Artisan/Business/Student/Apprentice/
Self-employed/Unemployed.

Education: Literate/Non Literate

Your phone number and e-mail address:

(If you would like me to contact you for further discussion or clarification concerning the information you have supplied)

8 Continued

- 3) E tegudejedy ege oko karu
koposaru any.
koswaru any.

NO 8 English translations

- 8(1) When a slave is feed, he
remembers his native Song.
- 8(2) Right beginning, assures Successes.
- 8.3, There is need for Self Control
in time of need.